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VILLAGE SERMONS

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VILLAGE SERMONS

Preached at Whatley

BY THE LATE

R. W. CHURCH, M.A., D.C.L.

SOMETIME DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S, RECTOR OF WHATLEY
FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE

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I

THE ADVENT OF CHRIST

"And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."—St. Matthew xxi. 9.

The Gospel for to-day describes the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, and also His cleansing of the temple of God. This was a few days before He suffered, before His ministry to the Jews came to an end. Hitherto He had always avoided any public display before the Jews. He had retired and hidden Himself when the multitudes wanted to come and make Him a king; He had forbidden people to publish His miracles. But now that He was about to suffer, He chose first to manifest to Jerusalem Who He was, and what claims He had. He claimed the acknowledgment which had been prophesied of the Messiah. He claimed it, and He received it. "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." He had preached, He had taught, He had worked miracles. He had shown Himself as the true King and Saviour, by all His words and works, by all His manner of life.

The Jews had seen all this. They had had the opportunity of judging whether indeed He were or not like that coming One of whom the Prophets with one voice had spoken. Now, therefore, He called on them to acknowledge Him. He claimed their homage, as a king does when he comes to his subjects. He claimed it, and He got it. The people saw their King coming unto them, "just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass,"—Him, whom they had so long asked for; Him, who was to speak peace unto the heathen, whose dominion was to be from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. So had He been described by the prophet Zechariah long ago; and so—so humble, so peaceful, so mighty—they now saw Him coming down from the Mount of Olives. And they acknowledged Him as their long-expected, long-desired King. They received Him as kings were wont to be received, with songs and marks of joy; green branches of trees and garments were laid down in the way for Him to ride over; and the people saluted Him, "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." And He, as He had been received as the coming King of Israel, at once showed His authority. He went into the temple of God and claimed it as His own; He cleansed it of those who polluted it by making it a place for buying and selling. Nor did any man dare to resist Him. This was the day of His triumph. This was the day of His coming to show what He had been sent to do; to show what He might do, even in Jerusalem, if He chose. Without any of the power

of this world, alone in the midst of His enemies, He made them submit to His kingly majesty, He made them acknowledge His authority. They looked on at this strange and sudden appearance with fear, and astonishment, and rage; but they dared not lift a finger against Him, or say a word to stop Him.

Now we can have no difficulty in seeing why this account should be chosen as the Gospel for Advent Sunday. For this passage describes the public Advent of Jesus Christ to the Jews; His public formal coming to them, to claim their acknowledgment of Him as the Prince and Saviour promised to them, and to show in their sight the tokens of His office. And this is, as it were, a picture and type of His coming at the end of the world, in glory, to take His perfect kingdom, and to sift and judge, and to cast out all things that offend—everything and every man that pollutes the kingdom in which He is the King. There was a prophecy which so described Him: "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, that ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope. And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." This prophecy was at first fulfilled when Christ came suddenly to the temple; and those who were polluting it with their worldly prac-

tices could not stand before Him when He appeared to drive them out from the holy place. But the prophecy also refers to that last sudden coming, once for all, to try and to judge the sons of men; when He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, separating the righteous from the wicked, and discerning between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.

This then is the reason why we read this Gospel to-day. It is the figure and prophecy of the way in which Christ shall come to the Church and to the world in His last, and greatest, and most glorious Advent. He shall come, not with a small company of disciples, but with the hosts of the angels of heaven. He shall come riding in triumph, but not then on what the world can give Him of its lowliest or of its highest, but on the clouds of heaven. He shall come, not to the one city of Jerusalem and its crowds, but to that of which Jerusalem was the figure, to the innumerable companies of the Church of God. And then every eye shall see Him, and every tongue shall confess that He is indeed the King, and Saviour, and Judge of men. Those shouts, and palm branches, and garments strewed in the way, are the figures of that unknown, unimaginable triumph which shall hail His appearance. Then, as when He rode into Jerusalem, all shall be moved, saying, "Who is this?" Then, as in Jerusalem, He shall go into the temple of God, the Church of those whom He has called to the knowledge of God, and shall cast out all who are unworthy of their high name and calling; all who have used His Gospel unfaithfully in their lives; all who, professing to be

the servants of God, have served none but themselves, and the world, and the devil.

These two points—Christ's coming to be acknowledged as the Lord of all things, and His coming to purge and purify His Church of the sinners who defile and disgrace it—are the two principal things to be thought of in connexion with His second coming; and they are, as we see, the points prefigured in the passage chosen for to-day's Gospel. In some ways Christ is still to us what He was to the Jews. True, we even now acknowledge Him as our King. But just as He was to the Jewish multitudes, so is He to many of us. We hear of His life, and wonderful works, we hear of His words of grace, we hear of His love towards us; we hear of His coming back again to wind up all things, and to judge us for good and all. But our thoughts about all these things are few and faint in proportion to their reality and greatness. We see without believing. We hear without laying to heart. Just as Christ taught the Jews, who had ears and heard not, so but too often does He teach us. Just as Christ did His wondrous works before the Jews, who had eyes and saw not, so we have His glory and grace before us all day long, without discerning them. But the day must come to us, as it came to the Jews, when He shall ask us—ask in most serious earnest—What has come of all this that you have heard and seen of Christ's works and words? What do you really think of Him? Is He your King, or is He not? Will you have Him to rule over your hearts and souls, or not? You must answer yes, or no, and say it in earnest; not as you say it now,

saying and unsaying, eager to-day and lukewarm to-morrow. But your real will must go with your words, and you must say it once for all—for good, and for ever. He came to Jerusalem as its King, and claiming to be received as such. He will come once again to the Church, and to every soul within the Church, as their King—as One whom they ought to have seen, and to have made up their minds about long ago, that He was their rightful King and Lord. And how, my brethren, shall we receive Him? The answer depends, practically, on how we are receiving Him now that He is out of sight. If now we are not learning to feel that He is worthy to be our King, shall we, do you really think, be ready—shall we be able to welcome Him when He comes in good earnest? He is, as it were, giving us now an opportunity of judging for ourselves what He is—what He must be. To the Jews He was veiled under the form of a servant; to us He is veiled by the clouds which have received Him out of the sight of men. But for all that, they had, and we have, ample means of judging for ourselves whether He is the Christ, the Saviour promised to mankind; the King worthy of their love and homage, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Did ever any other do such works? Did ever any other say such words? Did ever any other show such love to man?—May we see in time that He is fit to be our King, and may we show that we see it by living as His subjects and servants ought to live! that when He does show Himself visibly, we may be of that rejoicing multitude who will hail Him with triumph, as the long-expected King, whom we have loved and trusted in when out of sight, and

who is come at last to take His power, and reign for ever.

For, as the Gospel reminds us, He will come, not only as a King, but as a searcher and judge of hearts, as a refiner and purifier; sure to find out what is false, sure to discern the hypocrite, sure to cast out the polluter of God's temple, and the despiser of His grace. As Christ went into the temple of Jerusalem and cast out those who bought and sold there, and drove them forth with the terrible reproach, "My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves," so will He do to His spiritual temple, the Church. "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." He will come as the cleanser of His kingdom, the Church. That final sifting of those who now live together—who work and spend their days together—who have the same privileges—who to the eye of man seem to use them in the same manner—is one of the most awful thoughts that Advent brings with it. For the Jews did not defile their temple more than Christians have defiled Christ's spiritual temple and kingdom on earth. He meant His Church to be holy: they have filled it with unholiness. He meant it to be the witness to the world of heaven and heavenly things; they have made it often a byword and a reproach by their own wickedness. He meant it to be indeed a house of prayer, in which men should learn to have continual communion with their God and Saviour. They, while professing to

be members of it, have followed after the same sins as the heathen who know not God. We read how wroth Christ was with the buyers and sellers in the temple of wood and stone at Jerusalem, because God's name had been named on that temple, and He was dishonoured by what defiled it. How much more wroth will He be when He comes and finds a more spiritual temple—one not made with hands, but built up of the souls for whom He died—one not consecrated with sacrifices of bulls and goats, but sanctified by the blood of Christ and by the presence of His Holy Spirit—when He comes and finds that defiled by worse sin than the Jewish temple!

We heard read this morning a very awful chapter of Isaiah, in which he describes the sins and backslidings of the old Jewish kingdom. What if that same chapter should seem in the eyes of Christ to be a description of Christian people now? We know what St. Paul has warned us of, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come; for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." Can we read this description, and remember that St. Paul expressly speaks of the last times, and not inquire, with misgiving and anxiety, how much of it may not be found true in our day? Can we think of this being the state of things when "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple," to sit as a

purifier and refiner there, and not search and try our hearts and lives, lest we should be found to have some share in the pollution of Christ's kingdom and temple?

Let us then read and dwell on the Gospel for this day, in the light of Christ's great Advent. Let us see in it a parable describing how He will hereafter visit His Church, and warning us to be ready for Him. Let us ask ourselves, How should we receive Him? Should we be able to hail Him with joy, as our King long waited for, and at last beheld with triumphant hope? Should we tremble to hear that He was come to visit us, and shrink away from His presence, like the dealers in the temple?—May He, by His grace, impress on our souls the deep and lasting thought of His approaching coming. May He help us so to live through the day as those over whose souls, even now, Christ is King and Judge, and the searcher and trier of all our thoughts; so that when He comes His triumph and victory may be ours, and the setting up of His heavenly kingdom may be the beginning of our eternal rest.

II

NO CONTINUING CITY HERE

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."—HEBREWS xiii. 14.

HOW different is our lot from that of most of God's saints whom we read of in the Bible! Of them it certainly seemed true that they had no continuing city; as true as that they were seeking one to come. Abraham passed his life in wandering, and so did Isaac and Jacob. Moses spent all his days as a wanderer. Elijah was driven about by his persecutors. David, prosperous as he was, had no easy life. In the New Testament we read of the Apostles of Christ being persecuted from city to city; they had no home to stay in, no certain resting-place. They inherited their lot from Him who had not where to lay His head. No wonder that the Apostle should write, "Here have we no continuing city." But how different is our case from theirs! We are not persecuted and driven from place to place. Everything with us is quiet and settled and lasting. A man takes up his abode in a place, and expects to live and die there. He is afraid of no enemy coming to disturb him. He expects the law to protect him as long as he lives quietly, and it does

protect him. It is our own fault if we do not enjoy peace and tranquillity in the dwelling-place which we choose. People who cannot stay still, but move about constantly, we either pity, if they cannot help it, as if they were specially unfortunate, and had a trial above the common run of trouble; or we blame them as foolish and restless people who do not know their own good, and throw away the comfort which is in their power, and which other people enjoy. Everything with us seems so safe and lasting. Our city here, our country, seems a continuing one. It has lasted a long time, and every year it seems to get stronger and more settled and more flourishing. Other nations have their wars and revolutions, but they do not come nigh us. All goes on with us regularly, and as a matter of course, with as little disturbance as the order of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest. What the Bible writes of Abraham and of Moses and of the Apostles, that they were but strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seems in our quiet villages and by our comfortable firesides not true of us.

Certainly we might almost say that the order of the world was quite changed for us, and that we had managed to found for ourselves, even here, a continuing city, but for two things. It would be true but for this, that we have each of us to die. That makes all the difference. That makes the continuing city, however long it may last, however strong its foundations may be for the whole race and country, to be none for us. When we are gone what has become of the continuing city to us? Death, when it comes, makes us equal to those who

passed their lives without any settled home; our lives of quiet and comfort and their lives of destitute wandering are all one, when they are over. This is one thing. The other is, that the settledness which we enjoy cannot save us from the troubles of life—from sickness, old age, loss of friends, and such like. Our good laws can keep us from many evils, but not from these. Our power and wealth can hedge us round from our enemies, can increase our enjoyments, but they cannot keep us young, they cannot cure a sharp pain or disease, they cannot save from dying some one with whom our life is bound up. So that, after all, to each one of us, there is so much change and unsettling as life goes on, and at last such a great and utter change in death, such an entire breaking off and giving up of everything, that, in the long run, there is no real and true difference in our condition from that described in the Bible. God has indeed lightened it in a wonderful way, but not altered it. "Here have we no continuing city;" if the city continues, we do not. It is true of us all, whether we serve God, or cast in our lot with the world.

Yes, my brethren, in the midst of our abundance and peace and security the Bible speaks true yet. "Here have we no continuing city." But how different is the meaning of those words, according to the mouth in which they are found! The worldling and the servant of Christ are both forced to say them alike. Both must feel that from morning to evening things are changed, and that man "never continueth in one stay." Over both their heads the months and years roll away, carrying with them por-

tions of life never to be got back again. Both of them must feel how quickly life goes; both must make the same confession—here is no abiding place. But how different is the feeling with which they make it! How dreary and hopeless it is on the lips of one; how joyful and comforting on the lips of the other!

Think what it means to those whose heart is set on this world—"Here have we no continuing city." And yet the worldling has no other city but here. So that it means that he is without hope or stay to rest on. All his hope, all his stay, he has chosen to place here; and here nothing holds fast, nothing stays without changing first, and then perishing. Here he has no continuing city, nor anywhere else besides. Can an immortal soul say anything more sad, more desperate? He sets his heart on the world, knowing all the time that it will fail him. He works with all his strength for its good things, knowing beforehand that he cannot keep them. He labours early and late, knowing that the labour will be all wasted and thrown away. He sows, knowing that he cannot reap. He plants, knowing that he will not see the fruit. He builds, knowing that others will inhabit, and that all he can secure for himself is a few feet of earth in the churchyard. It may be sooner or it may be later; but, sooner or later, this is what all his schemes and plans, all his work and success, must come to, and he knows it; he knows that this is all he has to look forward to. The world will not stand still for him. Yes, he knows it, he tells everybody so; he is wise and impressive in saying so to others; yet for all

that, he will love the world which he knows he must lose, and lose his own soul, perhaps, with it. He is offered something which will never change and never perish. Beyond the city which will not continue, God shows him another, which hath foundations laid in eternity; but he turns away from that one, and clings with his whole heart and love to that which he knows has no foundations, which must one day—and one day soon—be swept away for ever. What a confession for an immortal soul to make, that here it has no continuing city, and that it has none besides to look forward to! In the days before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, as if the world was to last for ever, and they with it; and so it shall be, says Christ, in the days when He is coming back the second time. But the men before the Flood had not our experience, they did not know all that we know. They had only Noah's preaching, and we have the teaching of Jesus Christ. They blinded themselves by saying, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. We know better than to speak such folly as that. And yet, knowing, confessing, feeling that the world we love so dearly is on the point of being lost to us for ever, we do like them. The men of Sodom would not listen to Lot. But if they had listened to him, if they had been made to see and feel that their city was so soon to perish, would they have gone on dwelling in its houses, and delighting themselves in its good things so quietly? And yet even worldlings now feel and acknowledge about this world more than Lot could have told the men of Sodom. And still, as Christ foretold, like the men

of Sodom, they eat and drink, and buy and sell, and plant and build, knowing that their time is short, that their interest in this world is like a dream, that the day of loss and ruin will surprise them unawares, and take them all away. Can there be anything more dreadful in human folly and madness, than to hear men confess that this world is no continuing city, and yet to see them obstinate and determined to cling to the very last to that which they know is, day by day, sinking and perishing under them?

"Here have we no continuing city." It is the dreariest of all sayings in the mouth of those who have hope only in this world. But there is no dreariness in it in the mouth of the Apostle, or of those who follow the Apostle's faith. It comes in, only to bring along with it the words of hope and peace unspeakable. It is when a man stops short at it that it is so dreadful. The man of the world does that; he cannot go on to say, "But we seek one to come." But *we* seek one to come, and we do not seek at random; we do not seek on the mere chance of finding; nay, we seek that one which is sure to come, that one which is well known, and surely established, and of which all the Prophets from the beginning have spoken, and given us God's promise. Come it surely will—the new Jerusalem, the heavenly country, the Paradise of God, "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That one we seek; not as uncertain whether there is such an abiding dwelling-place or not, but we seek it as knowing that it is there if only we may, by striving, attain to it.

"We seek one to come:" and one that will not

be long in coming. Every day that takes something away from the continuance of this one, where we are now sojourners, brings Christ's servants nearer to that one which is to come, and never to go away. When a Christian talks of the passing away of this present world, he is but talking of the passing of that which is between him and his home. Why should he wish it to stay? It keeps him a prisoner, it keeps him from that rest which remains for the people of God; it keeps him in the midst of sin, himself a sinner still; it keeps him in the midst of danger. *There* he will be safe, here he is not safe; there he will be a conqueror, here he must fight and strive; there he will have gained all that he desires, here he can make sure of nothing; there he will be perfect, and nothing can be perfect here. Why should he grieve and sorrow at its changes, at the proofs which every day brings that there is not a continuing city here? There is much that is pleasant here, much to make us thank God that He has given us, even here, so much joy and gladness, so much comfort and hope. But what is the best that God gives us here, to that which He has laid up for those who seek and wait for the city which is to come? What is the beauty and glory of the earth and sky, compared to the glory which is round about the throne of God? What is the love of our friends here the sweetest and most blessed of God's gifts, which are merely of this life—to the love of redeemed souls hereafter to their brethren and to their God? What is there here for which the world to come will not make up, over and above, with full measure, heaped into our bosom? Why should we mourn that souls, created

for immortality, redeemed to be the sons of God, should spend such a short time here? With eternity before us, and pressing forward towards eternity, is it not long enough for us, the time that we have to spend on earth? "Here have we no continuing city." No; for God does not think this world good enough for those whom He has taken to be His children. "Here have we no continuing city," for God will not let it stay, and delay much longer the perfect rest and peace which He has prepared for those who love Him. While it lasts, and while we continue here, we cannot be with God. Therefore we may rejoice as it gradually wastes away and vanishes; therefore at every token of change and decay in the world Christ bids us lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh. "Here have we no continuing city" is to the Christian the assurance that this place of tears and sorrow shall not long continue, and that it will not be a great while before he comes *there*, where the tears are wiped from all eyes, and where they shall never sorrow more. "Here have we no continuing city" is to him the assurance that the temptations which vex him shall not last for ever; that his warfare shall soon be over, that the separations which make this world so bitter are, like this world, to be but for a time; that if this life is short, and vanishes like smoke, so do its troubles; and that our "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us"—in that abode which is to come—"a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

This is what the thought of the short continuance of our abode here brings with it, to those who believe what Christ has told us and promised us. We

know that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Oh my brethren, shall we not seek for the consolation of those high and glorious thoughts? We cannot keep the world from perishing. We cannot stay the sun, or stop the months, or hold back the summer as it escapes, or hinder the sands of life from running out. The world must go. So great and firmly fixed as it is, it must go; and our life must go. And shall our hopes and joys go with it? They need not. God is ready to save and keep them; to make them deeper, and higher, and surer, than we can imagine. But not if they are fast tied to this world. Shall we go on then, vainly dreaming of a continuing city here, which we know we cannot find, or shall we go forth in faith and hope, leaning on our Saviour Christ, to seek that one which is to come—to come, and to last, and to satisfy us for ever?

Listen to their voices and to what they said, who had that hope of old. It was with them no idle hope, no lazy seeking. What is it that the Apostle makes the text a reason for? It is, that we should not be ashamed to bear the reproach of Christ, or afraid to share His Cross. "Let us go forth unto Him," he says, "without the camp, bearing His reproach." And then he gives the reason: "For here have we no continuing city"—that is, we are not of this short-lived world, therefore we must not go along by its easy road, which was not Christ's road. This world continues not, therefore neither will the reproach and suffering which we endure by

following Christ continue. We are seeking that which is to come, where Christ is; therefore we must not be afraid to suffer for a short time with Him, that we may reign with Him for ever.

And what is the practical lesson which the Apostle draws from the text? "Therefore by Him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Because they have no continuing city here, therefore let them do, even here, the works of that heavenly life, of that city which is to come; works of praise to God, and works of love to men. Their words and their works are not to be of the earth, earthy, but those of men who, while they are on earth, are offering all that is of the earth a continual sacrifice to God. "Here have we no continuing city," therefore let us lift up our thoughts and hearts at once to where we hope to be at last. Let us fix our eyes on Him who is always the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever—Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith: let us think on the love and humility which are set before us at Christmas, on the glorious majesty with which He will come back again as our Judge, on the mercy and tenderness with which He looks on us now from the Father's right hand. And let us try by daily prayer, and daily self-denial, more and more to unfasten our hearts from that which cannot continue, and fasten them alone on Him who will never fail us.

III

THE INCARNATION OF OUR LORD

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."—ST. JOHN i. 14.

SUCH is the account, given with the measured solemnity of a creed, by the Apostle of the Incarnation, of that wonder of wonders which has brought us here to-day; of that which fills our hearts and our homes at this time with the tokens, and I hope also, with the reality of gladness and thanksgiving. The song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men," is again repeated; we follow back its echo along the ages, till we come to the hour when it was first chanted in the ears of the shepherds, in the midnight silence above the plains of Bethlehem. And now once more, in the end of the world, it is heard again; heard not in one place only, not in the plains of Judæa, but caught up by the living Church all over the wide earth, and carrying consolation and joy to thousands and ten thousands of faithful souls. Let us rejoice and be glad, for it is our God who sends us this joyful season, with hearts able to welcome

it and do it honour. Let us rejoice, and thank our heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He has sent us another Christmas, and spared us from heaviness and sorrow which would keep us from enjoying it.

But while we rejoice and feel our hearts lighter, in the midst of the glad looks and good wishes which are all about us, do not let us lose sight of the great event which gave occasion to all our rejoicings. It is indeed a shame to those who call themselves Christians, that they are so ready to catch at the opportunity of rejoicing and making merry, and yet so careless of *that* which gave them the glad time; that they are so ready for the outside, as it were, of Christmas, and so little inclined to consider what it really means; so ready for the presents and the merry-making, and so little prepared to think of that grace and love of God, in honour of which all these things are done. Let us give some place to thoughts about that love which passeth knowledge, which brought God's only Son to be with us—a Man among men; and that amazing lowliness which made the manner of His coming so humble, and yet so unspeakably divine.

Think who it was, who came as on this night, more than eighteen hundred years ago, upon this earth of ours. "The Word," says the Apostle, "was made flesh." Who was the Word? Was it some prophet, sanctified from his mother's womb, to bring the news of God to man? More a great deal than that. Was it some being, more than man, created to be the messenger of God to His creatures, and to declare His will to them? If we believe

anything at all about Him, it was more than that. Was it some great angel, seated near God's throne, who was sent to clothe himself with human flesh and blood? Was it Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God,—was it Michael, the prince of angels, —was it one of the Seraphim, who day and night cry aloud, "Holy, Holy, Holy"? It was more, infinitely more than that.

Who then was the Word? Ask St. John, and he will tell us. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." "The Word was God." This is He of whom it is said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." This is that Jesus Christ of whom it is written that His mother "brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." He is the Son of God, only-begotten, equal to the Father, ever with the Father, by whom also the worlds were made; "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God"—the brightness of God's glory, and "the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power;" He is "the first-born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." He is not to be named with the angels, for the angels

were made by Him, and Him do the angels worship. "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." He only knew the secret of God, for He was One with God: He only had seen God, for He was the Son of God, in glory with Him before the world was. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son"—Himself God—"which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." And from the glory and bosom of God He came, to be a little child, born in Bethlehem of Judæa, the city of David—and He who came was God.

This was He who came. Think of it, my brethren; for it is indeed such a thing as heaven and earth may well wonder at for ever and ever. Think of your Maker, your God, coming down among us; leaving His throne on high, leaving the courts of heaven, and the songs of the angels, and the brightness of His Father's face—to be with men. When you read in your Bible of the little child, remember that the little child who was born to us, as at this time, was the true and very God who made the world, and set the stars in their places—"Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." When you read of the child Jesus, presented in the temple, circumcised according to the law, in danger of death from the jealousy of Herod, flying into Egypt to find a refuge—remember that you are reading of Him who at the same moment was "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending . . .

which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." When you read of His coming into the temple, and asking questions of the Jewish teachers, of His going down to Nazareth with His parents and being subject to them—remember Who it was who was veiled under the likeness of a humble obedient child—even He who is the holy One, and the true, "He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth"—He who "shall come to be our Judge."

This was He who came: and what was the manner of His coming? Would there have been anything to wonder at, would it have taken off anything from the greatness of His condescension and love, if He had then come in glory, as He shall come hereafter to judge the world? Would it not have been equally a humbling of the everlasting God, if He had shown Himself in the flesh to men, with a majesty such as no one had ever seen before, and no man could gaze upon without fear and dread? Would it have been surprising if He had shown Himself to us in greater state and brightness than His own angels, in whose presence the sons of men fell down as dead? But it did not please Him to come in this manner. He came indeed "full of grace and truth;" He came with wonders and with majesty—how could He not? How could He not be full of wonders and full of majesty? But He showed, by the way in which He chose to come, how little our measure of what is great and worthy of God, is like His; how little what is poor and despised and humble in the opinion of men,

interferes with, or lessens, what is fit for God to do or choose. You know how He came. You know that there is nothing so pinched and trying in man's condition that He did not choose to go through from the very first; you know that there is nothing so mean, and rough, and dangerous, in what the poor of this world have sometimes to put up with, that did not fall to His lot when He came among men. He came among us a man in very earnest. That He might not be above any of us, He chose to be below most of us—on a level with the lowest among us—above none of us. That we might trust the reality of His companionship, of His brotherhood with us, He came into the world as we all do; He refused nothing that is appointed to man to go through. As each thing came in the course of years, He accepted it; He asked for no privilege as the Son of God, He desired not to be excused any weight of mortality; He began from the bottom, He hurried nothing—He waited till the years should change the babe into the child, the child into the boy, and the boy into the man.

And surely was not this the more heavenly way, —the way more worthy of God, than any way of earthly pomp and greatness in which He should escape from the common rules of man's life and condition,—the way in which we might have expected the Highest God to appear on earth? He had not riches, He was as poor as the poorest; but what were the riches of the world to Him who was the maker of all worlds? He was unknown and despised of men; but what were the honours of the world to Him, who even while walking among His

humble friends in Judæa was worshipped by the angels at His Father's right hand? He came not to be among us as a passing vision, or a strange sight, such as was showed to Israel on Mount Sinai. He came actually and really to be a man with men, to share man's lot with man, to be flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. He came to bind us to Himself by His life and by His death. He came that we might see and know that He had made Himself one of ourselves, living our life, feeling, suffering, tempted as we are, only without sin. He came not for His own sake, but for ours; not to be known and worshipped as God, but to love us, and to minister to us, and to save us.

And who of us shall seek great things for himself, when our God and Maker, in His visit to the world, thought so little of the great ways and choice things of this world? He passed them all by. He did His work without their help. Coming down to us, He, the Everlasting, Almighty, Ever-Blessed God—it was enough for Him to be a simple plain man, without the worldly goods, or worldly recognition, which men think necessary to make life happy—without the honour which men think ought to be paid them, according to their worthiness, or greatness, or power. It was sufficient for Him to be Jesus of Nazareth, and to be called the son of the carpenter, unknown as God, despised and unhonoured as man. But for all that, He was the Word of God, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. For all that, those who were near Him saw His glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." For all that, the angels broke out into His praises in the midst of the mid-

night sky; and the Wise Men of the east followed His star across rivers and deserts, till they found Him and fell down before Him, and offered Him their gifts; and the lips of prophets, waiting for the consolation of Israel, were opened in the temple to acknowledge and proclaim the Dayspring from on high, the Light of the world, which had dawned on mankind. There was honour done to Him indeed, but, as it were, by accident; He sought it not, He waited not for it, He hastened on to His work, and left it behind or on one side. It had but little to do with what He came for; which was to be as real man, man's true fellow-helper, his teacher and master in life, and his sacrifice in death.

And shall we think it hard to have to pass through life without all that our hearts desire? Shall we complain because God, who has made us men to live for ever in the world to come, has not given us all that other men have here? Is it not enough to have the promise of everlasting glory, and to be like God was Himself when He was pleased to visit us? Did Christ think it enough to be a man—a plain, unknown, unhonoured man—and shall we make ourselves unhappy, and be discontented and envious, unless we have the riches and indulgences which Christ passed by, or did without?

Oh, my brethren, let it be enough for us that we are men, of the same nature as the ever-blessed Redeemer—men, called to share heaven with Him when this short life is past. It cannot be a small thing to be what God our Maker became, that He might be more closely joined with us. Let us thank God for it; thank Him that He hath breathed the

breath of life into our bodies, and given us a living soul, which can know and love Him—a soul which was so precious in His sight that He gave His Son to die for it—which is never more really to die. And let us remember that He died for all—for all our friends and neighbours, for those whom we think above or below us, for those with whom we are at strife and disagreement. Shall we not then turn in heart and soul, one to another, when we think how God came down among us all, to share the nature of all, to heal the wounds of all, to sympathise with the sorrows of all, to save the souls of all? He stretches out His hands to us, as a little child—those mighty hands which bear up the sun and the world—but to us He stretches them out as a little child, beseeching us, by His meekness and gentleness, to be reconciled to Him, and to be at peace with one another. He beseeches us to lay aside our high thoughts, our scorn and our hatred, and to become in heart and soul little children such as He was, so as to be blessed for ever with Him in His kingdom. Hear Him, my brethren, I beseech you; listen to His tender pleading, to His loving, tender call. Refuse not His love; despise not the appeal of His lowly, innocent childhood. Listen to Him on this His holy day. Look on the manger and the swaddling clothes, the first steps to the Cross and the grave clothes. Listen and look, and turn in love, first to Him and then to one another. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

IV

THE WONDER OF THE INCARNATION

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."—GALATIANS iv. 4, 5.

IT is not wonderful that God should love us and care for us, for though we are so far from Him, and so unworthy, He made us: and we know that "God is love." But though it is natural that God should love the world that He made—though we might be quite sure that He would love it—the manner in which He showed His love to us, and the length to which He carried His love, is indeed past wonder. It is not merely His love, but the way in which His love took the world by surprise, that makes us rejoice, beyond all other seasons, at Christmas.

Let us try to fix our thoughts upon this. Let us try and break through the crust of darkness which use and custom, and the often hearing about these things, make upon our souls, and let us see the thing as it is. The coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, to save us—familiar as the thought of it is to us—is indeed worth thinking about. It is not strange that when it was first preached to man it

was enough to turn the world upside down, and to make that great change in it which we know the Gospel has made.

There is nothing astonishing, as I said, that God should love the world and wish to save it. We know that God hates sin, and that His justice must punish it. But if we men can have compassion upon sinners —if we can blame and even punish their sin, and yet feel our hearts melted and drawn towards them for the misery which they bring on themselves by their own fault—much more must that great and good God feel pity—He whose mercy is over all His works. It is not wonderful that He should have compassion on the world, even though lying in wickedness, or that He should desire to reconcile it to Himself. But what we ought to understand and take to heart is, that He has gone beyond even that which the boldest dream of man could ever have dared to think of.

Let us try to put ourselves in the place of some of those men of the old times before Christ came, and try to think what they—not knowing what we know—may have supposed that God was going to do for them. Let us suppose ourselves living in the days of the first man. God had promised men help in spite of Adam's sin. The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head was the first word of hope and comfort in the midst of their punishment. The promise was enough to show that God still loved and cared for men, that He would in the end save them from overthrow and destroy their enemy. It was enough for them then to have the assurance of God's protection and help; but just think

how little it told them of the way in which God was going to help them. What could they possibly know or imagine of the future which He was preparing for them? The words of the promise were very dark. They said nothing more than that, in the long run, some man should get the better of the evil one who had been the tempter of man; but they said nothing as to who should live to see it—nothing about man's happiness while he lived, or of his being saved from death, or of his rising to life again—nothing of life eternal and blessedness in heaven with God. By the men of the time the promise was treasured up as a sure proof of the goodness and forbearance of God. To us, who have been given so much more, it seems so dark as hardly to be worth having.

Or let us suppose ourselves living in the days of the Patriarchs. To Abraham and his children was given the promise of the land of Canaan, and the promise also that in him and in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed. Here, indeed, was something more. The promise was plainer—there was more to look forward to. But the words of the promise said nothing of anything beyond this world. They showed that God was watching over men, and that He meant to do them good, but to do them good in this world, and with this world's blessings. Supposing the men of that time did not know of another life after death, they would have looked upon the promised blessing as we look upon a happy life here, passed quietly and prosperously while it lasts, and sinking into a calm and painless old age, and the rest of death; and they must have thought that that was all.

Or let us suppose ourselves living in the days of Moses, or of David. We should have known more than the first men of the counsels of God. We should have had more experience of His care for men. We should have learnt more of His power and will to deliver men from evil, and to do great acts of mercy and kindness. We should have known more of His thoughts about sin—how He hates it, and yet how He patiently bears with sinners and is ready to pardon them. We should know, too, of a people chosen by God for His own; taught by Him according to His own truth, and in the commands of His holy law—of a people who had the Lord their God very near to them—of a kingdom on which righteousness was to bring down blessing from God—and of kings who were to rule in the fear of God, and to do good to man from generation to generation. But we have little said of the awful question, What shall become of men when they die? Shall they live again? Have they another life to look forward to, is it to last for ever, of what sort is it? Numbers and numbers of men in those days passed out of this life without knowing any answers to these questions. Yet they thought themselves fully satisfied, and gave God hearty thanks for His mercies of only this life.

Or suppose, once more, that we had lived when the Prophets began to foretell the great coming of the kingdom of God. Their words were indeed wonderful about what God meant to do for the world; they were much plainer and clearer than what had been revealed to the generations before them. Often they almost lifted the veil, and spoke without disguise of

what was to be done for the world. Still, if we had lived in those days we should not have understood those prophecies better than the men of the time did. And what did they look for? How did they expect that God was going to save His people and redeem the world? They thought of some great earthly king, coming with glory to set up his throne in the name of God, and with the help of God to overthrow the idols of the heathen and to break the yoke of the oppressor. They looked to him as coming in the power of God, and in the majesty of truth and justice, to reign over the delivered world, changed from its old ways of wickedness, and made new and fit for men to be happy in. That was the great thing which the Jews and many Gentiles were expecting before our Lord came. Many of them, indeed, believed in a resurrection and another life, but they knew not with certainty how to attain to it. They knew what sin was, and how God hated it, but they knew not how it was to be taken away. It was enough for them that the Anointed One, the great King who was to come, should rule over the world, and set up God's kingdom over the thrones of the kings of the earth, even if they themselves should not see this glorious change.

And can we say that their thought was a weak and foolish one? Would it not have been a great thing if God had so fulfilled His promise, and so shown His love and care for men? Is earthly happiness, with peace and justice in our days, with a kingdom ruled in righteousness and taken care of by God, a thing of small account, even in our eyes, which see beyond the grave? Is this not worthy of our Master's love

and bounty? The blessings of this life are great in themselves; they are only small as compared with a future life, and the blessings which God has promised in it. And if we had lived before men had heard of Christ and everlasting life, we should, like the men of those days, have thought that God had redeemed His pledge, and made good His word, by saving men from the evils of this world, and by giving them the blessings which they had learnt to think of here as most precious, most excellent, most lasting.

But there was more to be done for men than that; more to be delivered from; more to be bestowed upon them; more than they could ask for or that it had entered into the heart of man to desire. There were evils which were worse and more deadly to them than sickness, or pain, or shame, or death. There were sins rising up which called for punishment heavier than could be dealt to them in this life. There were blessings greater than could be tasted here. There was peace and joy for God's servants beyond what could be bestowed on mortal men still in the flesh. There were places in heaven waiting for them, to which no strength, no goodness of man on earth could attain. There was eternal death to be saved from; there was eternal life to be given.

And when the fulness of time came, God made known that these had been in His thoughts from the beginning. The first men had thought, when they heard of bruising the serpent's head, of some earthly punishment on their enemy, but God meant far more than that. In the days of the Patriarchs they

thought that He meant to give them length of days, and plenty of corn and wine, but God meant far more than that. In the days of Moses and David they thought that He meant to bless His chosen people with His peculiar favour—to be near them in His holy place, to accept their sacrifices, to hear their prayers, to save them from their enemies, to guide them by His law. This was indeed a great deal, but God meant far more than that. The Prophets taught them to look forward to a glorious kingdom of the Messiah, mightier than all earthly empires, more righteous than the rule even of David, and richer in peace and blessing than the kingdom of Solomon. But under all these ways men had hoped too little, had thought too little, of God's love. Great as many of their expectations were, they were all far below the real truth of what God was preparing for the world.

He was preparing to save the world, not for this present time, but for everlasting. He was preparing to forgive and take away the sins of the world. He was preparing to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He was preparing to make men sons of God—to raise them from death to glory everlasting. Far more than He had ever promised in words was He preparing to bestow in reality. And how was He going to do this? We cannot presume to limit His power. We cannot presume to say that He could not have saved and redeemed man, except in the one way in which He did so. Whether it was possible or not we are utterly unable to guess. But we know that He who had raised up wonderful prophets no longer made use of a prophet to bring

His Gospel. We know that He who "maketh His angels spirits," and sends them to guide and rule the worlds—who had sent His angels in former days to do His great errands of mercy and power — no longer made use of angels. But "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

This is the great wonder of the love of God,—not that He loved mankind, but that He loved them beyond this world; not that He redeemed them—but that He came Himself to redeem them by becoming one of them. This was the awful surprise which burst upon the world when first it was told among men that their God and Maker had come down to earth, and had been born of a woman, and had lived a poor man's life, and had died the death of a slave. No wonder that it startled Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian; startled some to love and adoration; startled others to unbelief and mockery. Some were drawn to repentance and a holy life, while others

were driven away in shuddering fear at so awful a surprise, at so near a God. No wonder that those who did not receive it counted it as foolishness. It must be so unless we see in it the inconceivable and infinite love of God. It must be a stumbling-block to every one who thinks what it is, that God should be made Man, to give everlasting life to men, unless it is to him the spring and source of all that is deepest in his thankfulness, most serious in his faith, most transporting in his joy.

We believe it. It is no stumbling-block to us. We receive what the Bible reveals to us, and what the practice and faith of Christendom, by such blessed seasons as this, have fixed deeply in our thoughts and feelings. Oh may we do more than receive it with our minds! May we learn to think about it, and see it in all its amazing reality! We are the disciples of One who became Man for us, and who was really God. We are redeemed by Him who made the stars and bears up the world; and who was once, as at this time, to be seen in a poor man's dwelling, on a poor mother's lap. We hope for salvation from One who loved us so dearly that He took our nature and shared our lot, and chose our flesh and our misery rather than the peace of His holy and glorious heaven. That is what we believe now. That is what we are praising Him for to-day. Can we remember it all and not wish to be like Him? Can we praise Him for it, and not pray that we too may follow His gentleness, His humility, His love? Can we really take in what it was, and understand it, and not pray with all our souls to be delivered from those sins of pride, and ill-will, and unclean-

ness, which stand covered with such dark shame when they are thought of along with Jesus Christ at Bethlehem? Oh may He be with us in spirit as He once deigned to come among us in the flesh! May He make us each Christmas learn something new of His inexhaustible depths of love, and give us more of the wish to be like Him! May He give us a more earnest purpose to live a holy life, and to prepare ourselves to meet His presence, and share His joy, when He shall appear among us again!

V

THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES

"Where is He that is born King of the Jews?"—
ST. MATTHEW ii. 2.

THEY came from a long way off who asked this question. They were not Jews. They were not men who were within the covenant, or who had had the hopes and promises of God revealed to them. They were Gentiles—men brought up from childhood in a different religion from that of the Jews—on whom the Jews looked down as blind and unclean. Whatever they were—kings, or learned scholars, or magicians, or astrologers—one thing is certain, that they were not Jews, but heathens; and that the country from which they came was very far off. Why God chose them, above all other Gentiles, to hear of Christ, and to see with their own eyes the Light of the world, we are not told. How God made them understand that the wonderful star which they had seen in the east betokened the birth of the King of the Jews, and that if they followed it, it would lead them to Him, we are not told either. What we know is this—that God chose them to be the first-fruits of the Gentiles to Christ; that He made known to them, in some way or other, that the

Gentiles were to have their share and interest in the new-born King; that Christ was come to reign, not over the Jews only, but to the uttermost ends of the earth. And having learnt that from God, they immediately felt themselves bound to go forth, to seek for Him whose coming had been thus made known to them. Knowing that there was so great and heavenly a King to be worshipped, and knowing that God had given them the star as the means of finding their way to Him, they let nothing hinder them. Though the way was long—though they knew not exactly whom, or what, they should find—they delayed not. Travelling in those days was a very different thing from what it is now. To go to the ends of the earth with us is a less difficult and less dangerous matter than it was with those men to leave their homes, and search for Christ at Bethlehem. Yet they were not daunted. The trouble and the hardship, the hunger and thirst, the dangers and the weariness, did not turn them back. They wanted to find Christ. Little as they knew of Him, they believed in Him as the most precious thing to be sought and found on earth. Like Abraham, they doubted not at the call; and they went forth, not knowing where they should be led. Those were brave and faithful hearts. Those were the men who win the kingdom of heaven—who are not afraid to trust their all to God, who fear neither trouble nor pain, who understand God's call, even when it summons them forth from home and country, and whose hearts are set on the things of heaven, and on the hope of drawing nearer to God, even while living on the earth. They resigned

themselves to God's keeping and leading. They went on step by step, feeling their way, as it were, and asking, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They did not murmur that the star first led them into the wilderness, and through the deserts, farther and farther from their own land. Still they went on following it; asking the people of Jerusalem, when they came there, to guide them farther; taking counsel with those who had the prophecies of God in their keeping, and to whom were committed His "oracles." On they went, when they were directed to Bethlehem; and their faith was rewarded. "And lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." And "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

Here then was He whom they had sought. Here was the King of the Jews, whom they had left all to find and worship. Who should He be? How would He appear to them? A king, even an infant king, dwells in a royal palace; and when they asked for the King of the Jews, they were shown to a poor and lowly cottage, the habitation of a carpenter. And the new-born King was a little child, looking like any other little child. Are there none who would have felt themselves disappointed and ill rewarded for all their trouble, by being brought so far to see such a common sight? But it was not so with these men; they were as humble as they were brave, and as meek as they were faithful. Here was the Christ—the Light to lighten the Gentiles—the King of the Jews; and

they were not offended at Him, though they saw Him only as yet as a little child. They, too, became in spirit as little children, to be followers of Him. They knelt before the little child; "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

I am sure that if we thought of the wonders of the history of our Saviour, as often as we read of them, this would strike us as one of the most touching, as it is surely one of the most beautiful, and encouraging among them. And now, what about ourselves? What are we doing to seek and find Him who was born King of the Jews? We have noticed three particular points in these Wise Men—1, their earnest seeking; 2, their not being offended at finding a humble child when they looked for a king; 3, their offering Him of their best. And how are we like them?

1. They knew that if they could find the King of the Jews they would find rest for their souls; and, cost what it might, they resolved to find Him. Do we too go to seek and to find the Saviour of mankind? They had to travel far and wearily to find Him; they had to follow the star among strangers and in distant lands. But how different is it with us! It costs us nothing to find Him; we need not go forth across the world to seek Him; "He that is born King of the Jews" is close at hand to us all.

2. And they, when they sought a great king, and found only a helpless, new-born child, were not

offended at Him. Are we as faithful—have we this spirit of little children? Or are we so used to Christ and His Gospel, that we think this an ordinary and commonplace thing, too ordinary to be worthy of much thought?

3. They gave Him, though but a little child, of their best. They offered gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh—precious offerings made to kings. What do we offer Him—Him, whom we know now to be indeed King of kings and Lord of lords—the risen and ascended Son of God? Do we offer Him our best? Do we offer Him, our Lord and our God, that which only He cares for—our real faith, and obedience, and love? Do we offer Him our hearts and our bodies, which are His by the right of redemption, by the blood which He shed to be our price?

This is what we ought to ask ourselves to-day, the day which reminds us of the first Gentiles seeking after Christ, the first Gentiles making an offering to Christ. It is no use thinking that we are following the path which the Wise Men opened to the Gentiles to come to their Saviour, unless we have also their spirit and their faith, unless we are ready to offer to Him, as they did, our best service. It will do us no good that to us the King of the Jews has been manifested, if we do not care about that inestimable privilege which God has given us. Let us pray to God that we may not despise Him, because He is so easily found, and has been so long known to us. Let us thank Him for having blessed us so much above those who had such hard trials and dangers to go through in seeking Him; let us

pray that we may not abuse our blessings. And if only He gives us grace to seek Him with the earnestness and faith of the Wise Men, surely we may hope to find Him as they did, and to be blest as they were. The star in the east—God's guiding hand and love—will appear to us here, leading us in our pilgrimage through the wilderness, and the long journey of life, till it appears again on high ; and we shall see Him, whom not having seen, we have believed in and loved,—Him who was born for us a little child, and who is now waiting for us in glory. And we shall rejoice with exceeding joy, and fall down and worship Him ; and offer Him, not the gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, of earth, but the entire devotion of willing hearts, with the endless adoration of the saints before the throne.

VI

THE USE OF LENT

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred."—ST. MATTHEW iv. 1, 2.

LENT is beginning. What use ought we to make of Lent?

Just think what Lent is. It is a time of several weeks long, which for ages among Christians has been set apart for more than usual seriousness. It is marked out from the rest of the year as more specially devoted to the thought of those truths on which all religion is founded. It calls on us to remember the sad certainty that we are all in a dangerous and anxious state—a state of sin and trouble, of death, of fear; and the comforting and blessed certainty that God, of His love and mercy, has provided a way of escape, and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. And there is this besides, to give to the time of Lent greater solemnity. It reminds us, year by year, of what our Master Christ underwent to accomplish our redemption, and to encourage us to follow Him. Its forty days are the memorial of His fasting in the wilderness, and of

His enduring strange and deadly temptations. They bring back the thought that He did not refuse to taste any of our hardships; that though He did not need to deny Himself, as sinful men do, yet that He willingly did deny Himself in painful ways, and in the necessaries of life, that Christians might be the more encouraged to follow His lessons of self-denial and of enduring hardness. He suffered Himself to be tempted—to be vexed, and insulted, and humbled by the devil—to be tormented and disquieted by having to wrestle against those temptations by which it was impossible that He could be overcome. The temptations and self-denials of our Lord for our sake, are before us all the days of Lent. Whenever we speak of Lent we are reminded of that Holy One of God, who for our sake endured the pains of want, and was tempted by the devil as we are. And then, to make Lent still more solemn, it ends with bringing before our minds how our Master finished His life on earth. It ends in that most awful week of the year when each day we read and hear of the agony, the sufferings, the death, the burial of the Son of God; and it ends also in bringing our thoughts, through the contemplation of His Cross and Passion, to the glory and hopes of His Resurrection. This is what Lent is: a time when the principal things which Jesus Christ endured on earth because of man's sin, and in order to take it away, and to give him hope and peace, are forced upon our remembrance by the very weeks as they pass; a time which from age to age for many hundreds of years has always brought the same thoughts with it—has always called on Christians to

search out and repent of their sins, and to remember what Jesus Christ suffered for the sake of sinners; a time, inviting and helping us to consider our ways, and to think more seriously about God, and death, and judgment, and eternity, to resist our temptations, and to bewail and put away our evil ways.

This is what Lent is. And now what use ought we to make of it? What is the use that it was meant for? It is plain that it was meant to be a time of special and particular struggle against our sins and bad ways. It was meant to force the evil and danger of sin upon our thoughts with more than common seriousness; to provide us with an opportunity of stopping to think what is to become of sin, and what is to become of us in particular, if we allow ourselves to go on without trying to get the better of our sins. For this the example of our Master is brought before us. We are made to go through the forty days, during which He did what we ought to do—denied Himself for the sake of the glory of God, and kept up, in the midst of suffering and loneliness, the hard fight against the devil. We are carried during these weeks, through the fast in the wilderness—the hungering and retirement from the company of men—to the last days, the rejection of the Son of God by sinners, the leavetaking at the Last Supper, the agony in the garden, the mockeries and buffetings, the scourge and the wormwood and the gall, the piercings of the nails, and the rack of the Cross. We are carried through all this that our minds may be forced to keep these things before them; that we may feel ourselves living, as it were, in the midst of these awful realities, and made

serious by them; and that by their being constantly about us, they may be for a while a kind of balance to the interests of this world which take up so much of our days and our thoughts. And this nearer and more continual remembrance of what Christ did and suffered to break the power of sin and the devil, is not merely to touch our hearts, and to make us praise and honour Him with our lips; it is to stir us up the more heartily to do and suffer our necessary part in breaking that same power of sin which Christ fought against.

This then is the special purpose of Lent. It is a time for trying our very best to break the power of sin, and to strengthen ourselves in resisting temptation. We ought, no doubt, to be doing this at all times. It ought to be the work of Christmas as much as of Easter. But it is good to have special times for giving more attention to thoughts and duties and truths, which ought to be our companions at all times. Repentance is indeed the work of no one part of our lives; it ought to run through them as long as sin runs through them. A repentance which is confined to Lent is but a poor repentance. But repentance—and repentance means the whole work of searching into and bringing to light our special faults, acknowledging them with sorrow and earnest intentions of doing better things, of taking steps to resist and overcome them—this repentance is a work which we are so little inclined to, that we gladly make excuses to put it off. And the benefit of a time like Lent is, that it helps us against ourselves; it offers us a fit and appropriate time, and takes from us the excuse that another time will do

as well, by saying to us—Now is the time, the proper time; the time when all Christians, for ages, have acknowledged the call to humble themselves before God, and to weigh and judge their lives. Now is the specially consecrated season, when everything will help and encourage you; it is a time when other things are, in a manner, made to give way, to help Christians in turning their minds to the holy lessons of their Master's life. Doubtless you must carry on your warfare against sin and the devil after Lent is over, or Lent will be of very little use to you. But you will carry on that war more hopefully if you will use the advantage which you have of training yourself for it more carefully and more seriously, with all the help that Lent gives you.

Our Lord's example brings two lessons strongly before our thoughts. In the first place, He was not above enduring discomfort and trouble in showing us the way of overcoming evil. His forty days fast—so long, so painful, so resolutely persevered in—is a warning to us, that if we would really overcome evil and the world, we must not shrink from what is disagreeable or troublesome. Surely Christ need not have gone through that long, weary forty days fast, but for our sakes. And shall we, for His sake, think it too much to submit to what perhaps gives us some trouble or inconvenience, if that happens to be necessary, in order to make a good fight with our temptations?

And another point is this. Our Lord did not overcome the temptations of the devil all at once, as it were, in a lump. He met them one by one. They were separate, particular temptations; and

separately He overcame them. Our fight against sin and temptation must be of the same sort. It is no use making resolutions *generally* against our sins. It is no use intending *generally* to resist the temptations to sin which may visit us. We must fight our temptations as they come, one by one. And conquering in one, will not let us be careless when another arises. We must overcome our sins, each sin by itself, if we are to overcome them at all. It will not help us if we feel *generally* sorry for our faults, unless we try to put our finger on the actual faults and sins which we have to get rid of. And this is the great difficulty of repentance—the great difficulty of the fruitful and useful employment of a time of seriousness like Lent. Many persons will give serious thought to the general feeling of their sinfulness; it is a very right subject to think of. But it is more difficult, and it is more tiresome, and more painful to set to work, and really look in the face, those particular sins which most thrive in us, and which we are most subject to. It is a hard trial of sincerity, very often, really to get face to face with our particular sins; but it is what we must try to do if we are ever to repent of them, ever to overcome them, ever to become pure from them, ever to have them really forgiven.

Perhaps in former days—in former Lents—we have tried to enter seriously on the thought of repentance and a better life; and we have not done much by our trying. It is a discouraging thought. I do not know any much more so, than looking back to all the serious seasons we have gone through, remembering all the good resolutions we made, and

now finding ourselves still doing the same wrong things once more, in spite of all our past experience. Yet, for all that, this once more, let us try. True repentance has often come after many failures. The earnest and hopeful beginning of the Christian life has often had many dreary failures before the start was fairly made. All we know is, that here and now God again calls us; again gives us a season filled with the most solemn thoughts to sober and encourage us. Again He offers us the accepted time and the day of salvation. Let us take it as it comes; with greater earnestness, if we have failed in earnestness before; with greater determination to live according to the spirit of the time, in mortification of our merely worldly likings, in true and unfeigned self-denial; with a more honest effort to find out and acknowledge what are really our besetting sins, and to spare no pains to resist them. Let us put before our minds the special temptations which each of us is likely to meet with—temptations to temper, temptations to laziness, temptations to covetousness, temptations to pride, temptations to selfishness, temptations to evil thoughts. Let us remember how our Master met His temptations; and let us resolve, by His grace truly and really to deal with ours as He dealt with His. Oh what peace would a Lent so used bring with it! How should we feel rewarded for the pain of the struggle, and of the self-denial, by the feeling of being honest and true to Christ our Master, and to our own consciences! What joy to find that we were treading in His steps, fighting the same enemy whom He fought, winning the same victory which He won! What consolation in the hope of forgiveness—what

delight in the prospect of final triumph, and perfect cleansing!

May the Lord Jesus Christ, the conqueror of evil and the destroyer of sin, be with us in these days of fasting and humiliation; and may He make each of us to know the plague of His own heart. In our blindness may He give us light, in our temptations may He give us strength; when we fall may He support us. May He give us power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and in all things to strive to do our Father's will.

In all our dangers and necessities, in all our sins, by Thy fasting and temptation, Good Lord deliver us.

VII

THE WILL OF GOD OUR SANCTIFICATION

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."—1 THESS. iv. 3.

THESE are weighty words. They strike at mistakes which are very common. They cut up by the roots false views of religion which are held, in word and in reality, by too many. They condemn and rebuke us for our want of earnestness, our want of sincerity, our want of faith.

There are some people to whom it seems to be a very fair and good way of life, to go on without thinking of changing into something better than they are; who think that it is not one of the things they are bound to do, to take some real trouble for this end; who think that all they need is to be no worse than their neighbours, and to keep from open wrong-doing and sin, which brings them shame and punishment in this world. But anything more they think not necessary. They hope to be saved, of course. But they think that they will be saved, as a matter of course. They need take no trouble. They need not ask themselves whether they are fit for heaven, whether they are doing anything to seek to become

fit. All they have to do is, to go on as they are, making no change, doing no harm, and looking after their business and their interests, and leaving their souls to take care of themselves. But as to wishing to become better, to leave off more and more things which are evil, to break through bad customs, to put away evil thoughts, and subdue bad tempers, to resist temptations, to rise up to good and pure and holy ways, they do not think seriously of it. Yet for all this, they hope, nay, they expect for certain, to be saved in the end. They would be shocked if any one doubted it.

There are other people who go beyond this; who think that there may be not only a safe and respectable way of living, without trying to be better, which is what the Bible means by holiness and sanctification, but actually that there may be religion without it. These persons think—sometimes they will even venture to say it (but many who will not dare to say it, will dare in their hearts to think), that religion is a thing entirely separate from the real lives they lead, from their common ordinary ways and doings, from the manner in which they feel towards one another and deal with one another. They think that religion is something which they believe in their minds, and feel in their hearts. Their minds may be very strong in conviction, and very full of what they believe. Their hearts may be very warm and eager, and be strongly touched and moved by the great truths and principles of Christ's Gospel. Certain fruits, of course, must follow from this. It will lead men to a certain way of speaking and thinking; it will lead men to do certain things, and to keep away from certain

other things, which, if they had no care for religion, they would not do. But what you have to consider is this. There may be this profession of religion, this care and zeal for it; and with it there may also be very little care about becoming in heart and soul what the Bible sets before us as really *holier* in thought and word and deed. And yet, it may never strike people that there is anything odd in this; it may never strike them—What is the good of believing, and professing to be religious, unless we try to be really better men, unless the fruits of righteousness are really growing in our souls and lives; unless we are making real, serious efforts after it?

We all know that people do go through life without thinking of religion at all, or at least seriously. They become very little improved by their religion. Ill-natured people look on and say, that they might just as well put aside their religion for any good that it seems to do them, for any difference that it seems to make between them and others. And these words of the text sum up what is said so often, and in so many ways, in the Bible against such mistakes. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," your becoming day by day more holy—that is, more good and true, and pure from sin and sinful ways; more and more obedient to what God has set before us; more and more able to resist and overcome the devil when he tempts us; more and more afraid to offend God, and more desirous to please Him, in secret as well as openly; more and more like to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The will of God, when He sent the Gospel into

the world, was that it should really make men better men. True, it was sent into the world to save us, to deliver us from the condemnation of sin, and the power of the devil; to bring us the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of acceptance with God; to tell us of everlasting life, and to offer it freely and without price, to all who receive and believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. But at the end, at the bottom of all this, lies the great purpose and desire of God, our sanctification. Men had corrupted themselves, and God wanted them to be changed to good. Men had sunk in evil, and God wanted to raise them up to righteousness. Men had lost the image of God, in which they had been created, and God wanted to restore that image. God loved and pitied us, made for such great and high things, and He desired to love us, not as rebels and outcasts, but as reconciled and obedient children. He gave His Son for us; but it was not that we might continue in sin, but that we should be helped forward to goodness. He forgave us our sins, not that we might go on sinning, but that having got rid of the load, we might now rise up to do better. He opened to us everlasting life, not that we should expect to enter it, sins and all, but that we might prepare for it in this life, by living here a life worthy of redeemed men, of the sons of the Holy and True God. At the end of everything—of the Gospel dispensation and call, of the promises of God, of the sacrifice and redemption of the Son of God, of faith in His name and admission to His covenant and Church—at the end of all, stands the great purpose and will of God, even our sanctification; the real working of that change in

us which is necessary to make men fit for the kingdom of heaven. God accepts us, that we may learn, and may be enabled by His grace, to become really good; God forgives us, that we may go and sin no more. God calls on us to believe and to have faith in Jesus Christ, that believing in Him, we may grow more and more like unto Him. God has saved us from destruction, and has told us that He has done so, that we might know how much He is in earnest in raising us from the sin and corruption of our natural state, and how set He is on making us companions for the pure and holy spirits who dwell eternally in His Courts and His Presence.

The great thing which God desires in man is goodness and holiness. How then do we mistake if we think that goodness and holiness are things of no great necessity, which can be left to take their chance, which can be put off to a more convenient time, without any serious risk! And yet this is practically and really, I am afraid, the thought of too many. It is the thought, and the deadly mistake of all, who under whatever profession, think that it is safe to live without trying in earnest to keep from all evil, and to follow after goodness. It is the mistake of all, who think that there is no call on them to consider seriously God's warnings and invitations to men, and of those who imagine that they can safely believe in God and His Truth, without any care or trouble to correct and amend what is amiss in their ways and doings. We may surely depend on this—that God did not send His Gospel into the world, except for us to live by it; and that God did not teach us so earnestly the ways of holiness and good-

ness, that God did not give up His ever-blessed Son, and send Him on earth to suffer and to be tempted, to talk with us and to comfort us, to be crucified and slain, that we, knowing all this, might still live no better lives than good and decent heathens, and yet be saved as Christians. The will of God is our sanctification. That sanctification, that work of making men good and righteous and holy, is partly God's work, and partly ours. Not that any of our work can be of any use without God; but God has willed that in this, as in all other things, men should work while He works, and that, unless they try to do their best, His grace shall not profit them. The work of sanctification is the work of that Blessed Spirit of Holiness, One with the Father and the Son, whom the Son promised to send down into the hearts of men. From Him only can come our sanctification, our improvement, our being gradually changed into better men. And He works in wonderful ways. He works in secret; and He works through his appointed instruments. He works in our conscience and in our prayers, in our solemn thoughts and desires and purposes after good. He works in our reading of the Bible, in our meditation on its realities, and in our sacred services of prayer and praise in the House of God. He comes with power deep and unsearchable, with comfort and encouragement, with precious blessings, with light, and heavenly warmth, and transforming power, when at God's Holy Table, in the breaking of the Bread, we meet with our unseen Lord, and are invisibly joined with Him, "one with Christ, and Christ with us." He is with us in our temptations; when we waver, it is He who

whispers to us still to resist; when we fall, it is His strength which keeps us from utterly giving way; when we triumph, it is He who upholds our heart, it is He who confirms and settles us in winning one more step forward on the road to holiness. Without Him, we can do nothing; and those who seek in earnest after better things, find His power at their side at every step. They know that without Him they could have done nothing; they know that with Him, and by His help, their labour need never fail.

That is His part in the work of our sanctification. But there is another part which we feel to be our own. When the Apostle says, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," he means, not only that you should be sanctified by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of holiness, but that the work of sanctification should be done by you for yourselves. This work has its many parts and duties; but there is one most important one. In its root, and essence, and foundation, your sanctification means this, the taking care of your thoughts. Take care of your thoughts, and your words and your deeds will almost take care of themselves. Take care that your thoughts are right, and you may depend on it your words and deeds will follow of their own accord. Take care that you do not let wrong things dwell and lurk in your thoughts, and you will be safe from them in your life and dealings. Take care that you chasten and keep in order your heart within, that you restrain its secret angry swellings, that you turn it away from the forbidden and evil thing; and its gentleness and pureness will flow forth of themselves into your temper and character, and your speech and actions.

Be true, be honest, be faithful, be just, in what you *think* with yourself in your inward communings and dealings with your own spirit, where no one is witness but God; and your words will be true of themselves, and the temptation will hardly come to you to deal unkindly and unfairly with your brother. Take care of your thoughts; let nothing unclean or shameful rest in them; let your thoughts be really raised above selfish and worldly and double ways; suffer no hypocrisy in them, nothing low and base; let it be in your thoughts that you try earnestly to understand, and accept, and carry out the will and mind of Christ; let it be there that you seek to be in reality what you profess to be outwardly; let it be there that you try daily to become better, more truly holy, more truly Christ-like, and the sanctification of your actions and outward life will be no vain struggle. You shall have no divided heart, no doing good with the feeling that inwardly you are only *half*-minded to do it, no doing right with the secret wish that you might be allowed to do wrong. The good within shall naturally issue forth into the same good without. The vine will bring forth her natural grapes and the fig-tree her figs. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things," just as "an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things." "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and the man doeth his works.

Let us remember that there is no word or law in

heaven or earth that can override this great saying, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification"—your separation from all sin, your growth in all goodness. Forewarned, as the Apostle says, we have been indeed, in every conceivable way; forewarned by the life and example of Christ; forewarned by the solemn words of His apostles; forewarned by our own consciences, which witness that it must be so. Do and say what we will, let us remember this, that "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit."

VIII

CARELESS HEARING, AND ITS FRUITS

"And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."—ST. MATTHEW xiii. 14, 15.

SIX times is this awful saying—the message of God to the prophet Isaiah when He sent him to preach repentance to the Jews—repeated in the New Testament. It was applied to the Jews by our Lord Himself, after He had been some time preaching among them, and had found that neither to John the Baptist, nor to Himself, would they seriously listen, or be persuaded to turn from their sin and be saved. He described the way in which men listen to the Gospel in the parable of the sower, by the seed falling on different sorts of ground; and when His disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, and not openly, He repeated the words of Isaiah as the reason why He could not speak to the Jews any longer except in parables. They had listened so long without attending, that it was of no use to

speak to them any longer in the ordinary way. They had had plain words spoken to them, and they had refused to follow them, so now plain words were to be taken away from them, and Christ would speak to them only in parables.

Again, those words of Isaiah are applied to the Jews by St. John, when he is describing the punishment which came on them because, though Christ had done so many miracles among them and called them so earnestly to salvation, they still would not believe on Him; therefore, at last, it came upon them that they *could not* believe, "that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled." And the same saying is twice repeated by St. Paul; once in the Epistle to the Romans, in describing the state to which the Jews had brought themselves by hearing and knowing so much, and yet sinning so obstinately against this knowledge—the terrible "spirit of slumber" which God sends at last on those who hear, and yet hear in vain; and once in the Acts of the Apostles, when, after having long preached to the Jews, and having made a last appeal to them in Rome, he found preaching to them and reasoning with them useless, and gave them up in despair—"Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." And so he left

them,—"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

Six times, I say, is this saying of the Old Testament repeated and applied in the New Testament. So strikingly did it seem to fit the case of the hearers of God's call in those days; so truly did it express the awful condition to which so many came while they heard it,—who began by listening without meaning to obey, who went on to listen to the words of Jesus Christ Himself without caring about them, who came at last to listen as a matter of course, as a mere form, or else to judge and find fault, and who ended by having their eyes blinded so that they could not see, and their ears made dull so that they could not understand—who, in the beginning when they might have heard, *would* not hear, and who, at last, *could* not hear. So great and so common did the danger of this state of mind seem in the days of the New Testament, when God sent, first His Son, and then the followers of His Son, to show to men the way of peace and salvation, that the words of Isaiah were continually coming up into the minds of those who preached the Gospel.

And is it not the text that comes up into our minds, when we look about us and ask, what comes of the preaching of the Gospel, and the calling of men to repentance now? Numbers hear the call now. Numbers have heard it since they were children. Numbers come regularly to hear it as every Sunday returns. It is not that there is any want of preaching. It is not that there is any lack of hearers. But *how* do they hear, those great multitudes who

every Sunday, week after week, come and appear before God, as if they cared to inquire about His will, and to know what message He sends them? When we see what comes of their hearing, when we see the fruit of their listening to the Word of God, when we follow them and see what difference it makes in what they say and do in the week-days—when sometimes we catch a sight of how they are employed, and how they are behaving themselves even at Church—is it possible to help thinking how their ways have been described in those awful words, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

Is it not so? Ask yourselves. Lent is well-nigh over. Ask yourselves what has come of what you have heard this Lent. Leave out what you have heard at other times—ask yourselves what has come of this Lent only. You have heard a good deal about repentance. You have heard how God punishes sin—you have heard how He is willing to receive even the worst of sinners, if his repentance is as real as his sin has been. You have heard it in sermons, and you have heard it in the solemn words of God Himself in the Bible. And what effect has this had on you? How much have you thought of repentance all this time? How much can you say that you have really tried to begin, to set your face to beginning, the work of repentance? Do you feel differently about your sins, about the necessity of

repentance, at the end of this Lent from what you did at the beginning? Are there not many whose thoughts about the matter are just what they were before? Are there not some who have listened, and gone away, and come back and listened again; and who, for all that they have heard or thought about the matter, might as well have been dreaming all the time?

But is there anything to be surprised at in this, when we consider how it is the fashion of many of us to hear? What is generally the frame of mind of the listeners to God's Word when they are met together in His House? There will be some who are listening carefully and earnestly; who have said to themselves that if they listened attentively they were sure to hear something which God meant for their warning, or instruction, or comfort; who have come to hear, and who will go away to remember, and think over, and lay to heart what they have heard. There are some whose minds are open to receive what may be that day's message to their souls, and who, when they have received it, hold it fast, and will not let it go, all through the week. But in every congregation, I am afraid, that it is not the most part who hear in this way. There are some who hear, and are moved, and make good resolutions while they are in Church, and while the words of the call which God makes to their souls are still sounding in their ears; but on whom the world, and their careless, unbelieving, impenitent ways, return again the moment they are out of the Church door, and have begun to talk again with their neighbours. These listen and forget. There are others

who listen and remember, but who sin against what they remember—on whom the temptations of week-day life come as strong as ever, and make them fall, even while the warnings of the last Sunday's sermon or the last Sunday's chapters are fresh in their minds. There are those who seem to listen; they look serious, their eyes do not wander, they appear as if they were attending; but alas! it is as if it were dead men listening. The eye is open, but the soul is far away; the body is that of a reverent and earnest listener, but the thoughts are full of other things—planning the next week's work—dwelling on last week's quarrels, and last week's stories—longing after some evil desire—considering how to make some good bargain; or perhaps—while the promises and assurances which have to do with eternity are being laid open and declared, thinking of the shape of a dress, or the colour of a ribbon. And some there are—often not the most ignorant, not the worst educated — who cannot be satisfied with mocking God in their secret souls; who cannot be content with thinking their own worldly or selfish thoughts, when it is the time to think of what God calls on them for—who cannot even pay the same respect to God's House which they would pay to the house and company of an acquaintance; who look grave and solemn if the eye of man chances to meet them, but who, when they are out of sight—perhaps when all around them are kneeling down in prayer—are whispering, and laughing, and amusing themselves—passing some foolish jest, exchanging some wicked words, tempting a neighbour to sin; who come to Church but to save their character, and are

not ashamed in Church of showing, without scruple, that they are hypocrites.

What good can such hearing do? What fruit can it bring forth? I will tell you, my brethren, what fruit it can bring forth. It can bring forth a great deal of fruit—of fruit, which lasts not through this life only, but which will endure beyond the Resurrection, and beyond the Judgment Day, to the furthest years of Eternity. It can bring forth the fruits of a hard heart and a seared conscience; of a heart so hard that at last it cannot be broken—of a conscience so dulled and benumbed with rebellion against the light, that it ceases to tell a man what is right and what is wrong. It can bring forth the blindness to the eyes of your understanding, which have looked so long on the light, and yet have not taken in the truth which it revealed to you. It can bring forth dulness and deafness to the ears of your soul, which have heard so long the outward sounds of repentance, and grace, and salvation, and yet never let them come in to be thought of, and embraced, in your hearts. It can bring forth the blinding and deadening of your mind, so that when you wish to turn your thoughts to serious things, you shall find that you have lost the power—so that when the plainest words of truth are spoken to you, in the time of your greatest need, on the very edge of death, they shall seem to you as words without meaning. You shall be able to take them in and understand them no more than one who is in a deep and heavy slumber.

This is the fruit that may come on any one from careless hearing; from hearing continually without

trying to use what they hear—from hearing formally, and without stirring themselves up to fix their thoughts on what they hear—from hearing as the mockers and the hypocrites hear. What happened to the Jews will happen to Christians also, if they hear as the Jews did. The Jews listened like proud, self-satisfied hearers; they heard and did not attend—they heard and did not believe—they heard and did not obey—they heard and they rebelled. By little and little their hearts waxed more and more gross, their ears became more and more dull of hearing, their eyes became more and more blind to all that concerned their salvation. So they went on, day after day, year after year, till their iniquity was full, and their sin was ripe, till they had let the sickness of their souls become past cure. And then went forth the dreadful sentence that they should see no longer, though their eyes seemed still open; that their ears should be deaf, though the words seemed to come through them: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not": "That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." "Therefore they could not believe," so says the Apostle John, "because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

It is our Lord Himself who says to us, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. . . . Take heed

what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he hath." You cannot say that you have not heard; ask yourselves earnestly, *how* you have heard. You have heard of repentance—you have heard what we must all submit to if our sins are to be forgiven, and taken away in Christ. And now we are going on to hear about something more solemn still. We are going to hear how our Saviour died, that the sins which we are so given to might be pardoned. We are going to hear of all that is most awful and most tender in the love of God to sinners. And how shall we hear that? If we have been listening carelessly, fruitlessly, mockingly, hitherto, about the evil of sin, and the hopes of salvation, how can we suppose that it will be any good to us to hear of the Cross of Christ? And is there anything more dreadful to think of, than that we should sit and listen, without caring or feeling about it, to the words which tell how the Son of God was crucified and slain for us?

If you have never listened to any good purpose yet, pray God that He will touch your heart, and give you grace to begin to listen now. It may not be too late. You have neglected and left it a long while, but you may still, by His help, repent and turn to Him. If you leave it any longer—if you refuse still to listen—the day may not be far off when your eyes will be sealed, and your ears closed, and your heart hardened against the truth, for ever.

IX

THE BARREN FIG TREE

"And when He saw a fig tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away."—ST. MATTHEW xxi. 19.

I DARESAY you all remember the account of the fig tree which had leaves and no fruit; and on which our Lord pronounced His curse, because, coming to it and seeking fruit on it, He found none. It had the show and outward signs of being a fruitful tree, it looked well at a distance, it tempted the hungry traveller by its promising appearance; but when He came to it seeking fruit, it mocked Him—its fair outside show had deceived and disappointed Him. It disappointed not only men, but One who was more than man; and from Him it received the sentence of judgment, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." "And presently the fig tree withered away."

I need not tell you that our Lord did not care about the fig tree, and that it was not for its sake or for His own that this was done. It was for the sake of those who stood by and saw it. It was a solemn preaching set before their eyes, instead of being

given in words: a sermon *done* instead of *spoken.* It was the burden of the last warning which He was giving. It was the sign that His long-suffering and patience towards the Jews, who had deceived and disappointed their God with outside shows of religion, was coming to an end.

Observe when it happened. It was a few days before the Jews delivered our Lord to Pilate to be crucified, when His ministry to them was almost over. It was at the beginning of His last week in Jerusalem. We all know how that last week ended, —ended in those awful hours of sin and blood, which we keep in remembrance on Good Friday. But how did that week begin? Why is to-day called Palm Sunday? Is it not that the week which ended in the Crucifixion, began with the triumphal entry into the city? It began with the multitudes going out to meet Him at the Mount of Olives. It began with their cutting down branches from the trees, and strewing them in the way. It began with their casting their garments before Him, for Him to ride over. It began with their taking branches of palm trees, and welcoming Him as a King and a Conqueror, crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest:" That was the way in which they seemed to receive Him. He came to His own, and His own seemed ready to do all that He wished. Could they have made a louder profession of their love and faith? Did He not seem to have found in them a thankful and obedient people, sensible of His greatness and glory, and full of zeal for His honour? Did they not seem full of warm

affection and holy rejoicing? Would you not have thought that they would have been only too glad to do anything to please Him, to keep His word, even to die for Him? They were this in all outward appearance at the beginning of the week; any one looking at them would have thought that they were wholly Christ's; any one would have said that Christ had not come in vain, that He had found in them what He came to seek. And yet,—you know what they did to Him before the week was out.

But Christ was not deceived though men might have been. He knew what was in man. He knew what all this loud appearance of zeal and love was worth. He knew what all this carrying of palm branches, and shouting of Hosanna, and strewing of garments in the way, meant, on the part of these multitudes. He knew how little they had in their hearts welcomed Him, while they glorified Him with their lips. He knew what was behind all this fair show—hearts unchanged, unhumbled, unrenewed, still enslaved to their own lusts and sins—hearts without the fruit of grace—hearts which, in a few days, would be overflowing with mockery and hatred against Him. He saw it, and He showed it to His disciples in the sign of the fig tree. There, as in a parable and figure, the disciples saw what that week was to bring forth; the fig tree full of leaves and empty of fruit; the Jewish people full of promise and show, but in heart far from God; the fig tree tempting Him to come to it by its look of abundance, and sending Him away empty; the Jews receiving Him in Jerusalem with

joy and worship, and in a few days delivering Him to die on the Cross ; the fig tree condemned by its Maker to destruction, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever," the Jews for their hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, cast forth for ever from God's grace and promise, and withered up by the roots, in the wrath of Him who had come to be their King and Saviour.

This was what the sign of the fig tree was first meant to show forth. It was the sign of the sin and the punishment of those who, when it was spoken, called themselves God's chosen people. We see clearly enough how great was that sin. We see clearly enough in their case the meaning of the full show of leaves on the fig tree, the want of fruit, the deceiving promise, the utter disappointment. We see clearly enough the meaning of the curse, and of the withering away of the unfruitful and deceiving fig tree. Their sin and their doom are written with a pen of iron, and are hung up before the eyes of mankind for ever. We all of us know it. We have all learnt to condemn and wonder at it. But now let us turn from them. It is easy to condemn them, and to say how like they are to the barren fig tree. But let us turn from these dead Jews to our living selves. Those unhappy men have long ago gone to their terrible account, with the Blood of Jesus Christ on their head. They are in the hands of their God and Judge, and the world has nothing more to do with them. Their sin is done and over, their judgment is fulfilled and sealed up. It is no use thinking about them, how wrong and mad they were in not taking warning, how strange and inexcus-

able was their fair show and inward rebellion. They are gone. But the sign of the fig tree remains; a sign no longer against them, but against those who are now alive, those whom Christ is calling and trying now, whether He shall find fruit on them or not; those who still have their souls either to lose or save.

The question of this time, the awful question which rises up against each of us, is—What are we the better for Christ having died? We wonder at the obstinacy and wickedness of the Jews who rejected and crucified Him; we pass our judgment on the greatness of *their* sin, who, when He came to them and healed their sick, and raised their dead, and spake as none other man spake, yet refused to listen to Him. But that is not what Christ will ask us about. That is not much business of ours. He has done something for us too, and our business is with that. The things which at this time we read about, the things which He did and suffered, are not read because of the part the Jews had in them, but because of what they have to do with us. Let us not mind now whether the Jews were the better or the worse for what Christ did for them. Let this be our question, let us keep this before our minds now, What are *we* the better for Christ having died?

Remember that in outward profession and show we all of us give ourselves out to be the better for it. We put forth leaves, like the fig tree, inviting Christ to come and see if there is not also fruit in us, trying to give the appearance to all who see us that there will be fruit found in us. Why are we

here to-day, listening and worshipping, but that we profess to be the better for what Christ has suffered? We are here met together as penitent sinners, come to bewail together the sins which nailed Him to the Cross; come to praise together the love which made Him give His life for ours; come to pray together that He would make us worthy followers of such a Master. We are come to bear witness together of our hope and trust that in His Blood our souls may be washed, in His Wounds our wounds may be healed, and in His joy and glory we may one day have our part. If we are all this, we are the better for Christ having died for us; and we all profess by our being here, that we are all this. We profess it by our name of Christians; we profess it by the words of our lips; we profess it by the wish that we have that we should bear a good character among our neighbours. But these may be but the leaves on the fig tree, while there is no fruit. What is there in you more than leaves? What are you—not in show and appearance, but in heart and reality—the better for Christ having died for you?

What difference has it really made to the whole course of your thoughts and life? Christ has died for us, died for us all; and we have all been admitted to partake of the benefit of His precious Blood. And yet what do we see? Though Christ has died, are all men, are all who call themselves Christians, convinced that sin unrepented of must drag them to destruction, with His precious Blood on their souls? Are they convinced that there is nothing that a man can give in exchange for his soul, and that it will profit him nothing if he gain the whole

world and lose his soul? Are they persuaded that indeed the wages of sin is death? Have they all turned in earnest to that holy and merciful Saviour, who is the only refuge and strength and comfort of sinful man, and have they set their heart to listen to His voice and to follow it? You know what numbers there are who, though Christ has died, live as they might do if He never had died for them. You know how many live estranged and alienated from Him, who never let a thought of heaven and of God come into their souls; who spend their lives without prayer; who think only of what belongs to this world; who, to become what Christians are described in the Bible, must utterly turn and change from the evil ways of sin and carelessness and ungodliness in which they now are passing through life, must be changed in heart and spirit, in word and thought. And you can answer the question as well as I, as to such persons as these, What are they the better for Christ having died for them?

But the question must not stop here at these persons, who, while they turn their backs on God, have got no good at all from Christ having died, but who, while they will not turn to Him who so loved them, choose evil rather than good, and are therefore not the better but the worse for Christ having died for them. Would that this terrible truth, that while they follow their lusts and sins they are the worse for all that their Saviour has done for them—would that it would make them stop in their course, if not for love of Him against whom they are sinning, at least for fear of what they are heaping on their own souls—those souls which, whatever strength or

pride they may feel now, must one day be so helpless, so hopeless in the day of reckoning. But the question must not stop at them. It is every bit as much a question for those who do think about religion; who think about it seriously; who hope that God's grace has drawn and inclined their hearts to His service. Now that we are reminded again in these solemn days of the height and depth of our Saviour's wonderful love to us, who is there who has any faith or any love to God in his soul but must ask himself, with shame and self-abasement, What am I the better for Christ having died for me?

Yes, my brethren, What are you the better? I do not ask what difference it makes in your outward profession of zeal and obedience. I do not ask whether it makes a difference in your words, in your outward show of worship, and in the honour you pay to God's name. But what are you the better in your heart and spirit? Christ died to make you think little of this world and much of the next; has His death made you do so? Christ died to crucify your sins and lusts, to mortify and kill all vices in you; has His death done so? Christ died to make you look for your reward in heaven, to make you care little for the praise or the blame of men, when they praise what Christ hates, and blame what He loves; to make you live all day long as if the Eye, the watchful and loving Eye, of your heavenly Father was on you; has Christ's death so wrought in you? Christ died that He might show you that we must not look to have our own way here; that we must seek, not to do our own will, but the will of our heavenly Father; to teach us in all our troubles and trials to look up by

faith from this world, to the glory which shall be revealed; has His death done this for you? Christ died to make you see that whom God loves best He chastens; has it taught you this indeed? Christ died to teach you that there is no service of love which Christians ought not to be ready to show to one another; have you at all learnt that lesson? Christ died to show you how to love, how to forgive, how to forbear, how to be silent when provoked, how to return good for evil, how to be reviled without answering again; has it made you loving, forgiving, forbearing, meek, enduring? Has it taught you to put a bridle on your tongue when tempted to speak angrily and hastily? Has that death for love of you come into your thoughts amid the rubs and disagreements of daily life, when one neighbour was troublesome, and another was unkind, and another was cross and would not speak to you, and another was unmindful of some good turn? Has it come into your thoughts, and encouraged and cheered you up to bear the troublesomeness, and not to revenge the unkindness, and to meet the crossness with a bright look and a friendly word, and to forget the unthankfulness? Christ died to show us how to follow the example of His great humility; has that example made you ashamed of thinking highly of yourself, of your pride and conceit, of setting yourself up above others, of being stiff and obstinate in standing up for what you think your due? Has that lowly death made you afraid to despise even those who seemed the meanest and lowest? Has that death, which was endured to save the whole world, made you feel the great price of the soul of the very least among your brethren?

Christ died to make us all one in Him, one in His love ; to take away all hatred and envy, to make us ashamed of our jealousies, and parties, and divisions ; has His death made you hate and fear jealousy, and envy, and ill-nature, and division, as an accursed thing, and made you long and pray above all things that here and everywhere, in every family and neighbourhood, all who name the Name of Christ may be one in mind and one in faith, one in body and one in spirit?

What are you the better for Christ having died? Remember, that if you are really the better for it, you will not be satisfied to say that you can find *some* of these marks of righteousness, and of the Spirit, in your heart and life. For unless they are, in some measure, *all* of them together there, you have no reason to think that any of them are there as they ought to be. For Christ died, not to make us good in one or two things, but to make us holy ; and to be holy is to be like Christ, in all things that we can be like Him in. The fruits of the Spirit are growing fruits. If they really are true and living fruits, they do not stand still. The power of the Spirit is their inward sustaining life and root, and makes them increase and abound more and more. If we really are the better for Christ's having died for us, we must be better this year than we were last year ; and the only proof or sign that we have, that we are better, is that we see more clearly than we did how far we are from being what we ought to be ; and that we are trying more earnestly, and with more care and more prayer, to do God's will better, and to keep down more continually and more thoroughly our evil

thoughts, and evil wishes, and evil tempers—the passion, or the unforgivingness, or the pride, or the jealousy, which has so often made us fall, the sin that doth so easily beset us.

Now then, my brethren, remember that Christ is coming to the fig tree to look for fruit, to look for the fruit of His precious death ; to look and see of what good His dying has been in the world. He comes to us in our turn, as He came to the Jews in theirs ; as He has come year after year since, to all who were alive at the time, and had heard of His dying. The remembrance of His death has come round again ; and He comes and asks us all, What are we the better for His having died ? What difference would it have made to us if He had not died at all ? *We* are now the fig tree to which He comes seeking fruit. Of leaves there are abundance, of the show, and name, and profession of religion there is no lack. It is on all sides of us, it is in ourselves. *We* are inviting Him to come ; we are putting forth the leaves of promise here, as we are met together to-day. What is there besides leaves ? What is there behind the leaves ? Oh, my brethren, how if it should be with us as a body—or if it should be with any one of us —that Christ is finding only leaves ? Do you remember what He said ? "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." "And presently the fig tree withered away." "*Presently !*" though He was just on the point of dying for the world. Oh, you for whom Christ died, and who are not yet the better for it—you for whom Christ died, and who yet love your sins—will you not awake before that "presently" be said of you, and all be too late ?

Some of you were of those who were confirmed last Monday. Some of you here present have been preparing for the last weeks to profess yourselves once more Christ's soldiers and servants, and to receive once more the outpouring of His gifts of grace. You have prepared, not without time and trouble, and on Monday the moment came. You stood and renewed your promise to God; you knelt before His Altar, and received His Fatherly blessing from the hand of His Chief Minister. Oh, what a putting forth of leaves was there! What a time it was of hope and prayer for those who are to fill up our places in God's Church when we are gone! What a muster and gathering of young souls come to dedicate themselves to God; come to commit themselves and their lives, and all their trials and chances, to their Heavenly Father, to the keeping of His good Spirit! All could see the leaves, the crowded and abundant leaves, which invited Christ to come and look for fruit. And what was the fruit? The fruit was your own hearts, the heart which each of you had to give to your God and Redeemer; the heart of each, according as it was the better for coming there, according as it came with humble sorrow for its sins and true desire that God should cleanse and strengthen it, and take it for His own. Christ knows what fruit He found under those leaves; but you know something about that too. You can tell at least whether you wished—whether you earnestly tried—that He should find fruit. You can tell what sort of fruit, in word and thought, in wish and deed, your heart has brought forth during the short week that has passed since your Confirmation.

By that, judge yourselves. And if you fear that it was little more than leaves, think over that day again —its solemn sight, its solemn gathering together, the vow you made, the blessing you received,—and pray that it may not have been all in vain, all thrown away. Pray that even yet you may be accepted and blessed in very deed. Pray that you may have time, and repentance, and opportunity given you to bring forth your fruit in due season, before Christ, who came to you in such love in your Confirmation, comes to seek fruit, for the last time perhaps before the Judgment Day.

X

CHRIST'S LOVE TO MANKIND

Monday in Holy Week

"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them."—ISAIAH lxiii. 9.

THESE words of the Prophet sum up that great display of God's mercy to mankind, which brings us here this evening, out of the course of our usual services, to stir up in our minds some due remembrance of it. These words describe what all these things were done for, which filled up the last week of our Saviour's life on earth. They explain that awful mystery of sorrow and suffering, of which the Holy Week is the yearly memorial. They remind us of our wants and of our misery. They remind us how these wants and this misery were softened and comforted and relieved, by the mingled love and affliction of One, who, but for our sins, had never known what it was to suffer. "In all their affliction," in the affliction of mankind, in all that every son of man has suffered, "He was afflicted . . . in His love and in His pity He redeemed them." Here was the secret of all that grief and woe. The end

of it was to redeem the world. The moving cause of it was the love and pity of the God and Maker of all things to the poor creatures of His hands.

The love of Christ to the world, the love of Christ to every one of us,—this is what you have to keep in mind, while you try to realise, and follow in your thoughts, step by step, the awful scenes which the Gospels set before us day by day. The story itself is one indeed to move us to tears and sadness. Think of it only as a story. Think of it only as the story of a very good and pure and righteous man, trying his best to teach the truth to his brethren, sparing no trouble to relieve their wants, pouring forth the riches of a loving and tender heart on all within his reach ; of such a one, misunderstood, suspected, abused, slandered, mocked, crossed in every way. Think of him not only evil spoken of, but plotted against by those to whom he had done nothing but good ; think of him, as I say, ruined—delivered up to the unrestrained vengeance of the wicked ; imprisoned, tried, judged, condemned ; not left even to die in peace, but in his misery insulted, outraged, and ill treated, far beyond what even his unjust sentence condemned him to. Think of the innocent, dying without any to save him, any to speak a word for him—he, so innocent, and good, and true. Think of his dying the most accursed and most painful of deaths, in company of the basest and the vilest. Think of all the kindnesses that he had done, forgotten and blown to the winds, in the triumph of his enemies, and the thanklessness of the rest of the people. Think of his dying, desolate and

forsaken, in slow minutes of exhaustion and agony. Think, I say, of all this, only as if it was the story of a good and righteous man, suffering merely because of his own goodness—and is there any story in the world that could so fill our eyes with tears, and our hearts with pain and sadness?

But, my brethren, you know that this story has another and a greater meaning. You know that this sufferer was not a sufferer for Himself. You know that He did not merely suffer in order to uphold and witness to truth and goodness and righteousness. You know that He was not put to death only because His enemies hated Him. You know that there were other, deeper, more awful, reasons for that terrible death, than the blindness of men who would not see the truth, or the malice of sinners who could not bear One who came to show them what it was to be holy. We had better not read that sad story at all, if we only read it in this light: if we see in it nothing but the strange mournful fate of one with whom we have nothing to do. It was much more than a history, now past and done with, of man's goodness, rewarded by man with persecution and death. It is the story of affliction brought on the holiest and purest innocence, not merely by the ill-will and jealousy of those who saw and hated it, but by deeper, sadder—ah! and yet, by more blessed reasons still. It is a story in which the people who seem to have most to do with its terrible and affecting course, are in reality but a trifling and most insignificant portion of those who were really concerned in it, in all its most solemn and lasting interests. It is a story of love, carrying the Holy and the Just One to death, not only to witness

to the reality of holiness and justice before an evil generation, but carrying Him to death for the even greater purpose of laying down His life for the sins of the ungodly and the lost; laying down His life, and accepting the shame and agony of death, for the ten thousand times ten thousands of mankind; laying down His life for the sins of the whole world; laying down His life *for us.*

It is not enough ~~then~~ to read of the agony, and the scourging, and the mockery, and the Cross, and to feel touched, and even to weep at it. We must think of what there was behind all this. We must think of the real spring and cause of it all. We must think of what it was that made the sufferer willing to accept it all. Except with the thought of the love of Christ for men, we read in vain the history of His last week of woe. Except with the remembrance that it was the love of us that brought Him to suffer, the account of those sufferings will do us no more good than any other affecting tale of sorrow. Except with the remembrance that it was not the sins of the Jews, nor the malice of the chief priests, nor the treachery of Judas, nor the cruelty of the executioners, that brought Him to death—not all these, for these He could with a word have stopped —but our sins, and the sins of all mankind, that, in very deed, led Him forth to die; we shall be but unprofitable readers and hearers of His Passion. Unless we remember that it was His love for us that constrained Him to bear all this, we shall miss the meaning of His teaching; He will have shown us His afflictions, and all the steps of that long road which led Him to death—He will have shown it us all in

vain. It was the love of us that brought Him down from heaven. It was the love of us that made Him wait patiently all those years, till His hour was come. It was the love of us that made Him bear the contradiction of sinners. It was the love of us that was the secret of that agony in the garden, of that bloody sweat, of those strong longings and tears, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me;" of that mighty power of resignation and self-sacrifice, "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done." It was the love of us that urged Him forward, and bore Him up, under the traitor's kiss, and the ruffian's blow; in the hall of the High Priest, and before the judgment seat of Pilate; under the crown of thorns and the mockery of Herod; under the insults of the multitudes and the sneering defiance of the great. It was the love of us that supported Him beneath the load of the Cross, and while hanging on it; under the thirst and the shame, under the sense of parting life and of God's forsaking Him; in the hour of darkening, in the expiring groan. If you read all this, without the remembrance of its being a veil, behind which is burning, in all its heavenly glory, the love of Christ for men, it will seem to be all a dark and mournful vision. But read it, on the other hand, with the key which He has given,—read it as He has taught us to read it, as the open and manifest revelation of that "Love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and we shall begin to read of something that concerns ourselves; something in which a love, which even now it is told us, we can hardly conceive or imagine, has been extended to ourselves; something which, if it shows

us in the most tremendous colours, what our sins have made necessary, shows us also, that in the Holy God, who judges and punishes sin, there is a love and mercy which can even prevail over judgment, and which has brought Him down, not only to take our place on the day of punishment, but in all our afflictions to be afflicted—to be the companion of the guilty and the lost—to carry the immortal flame of His love towards men even into the depths of agony and anguish, and of lost hope.

O Love of Christ to men! Who shall hear the story of what Thou hast chosen and endured, who shall hear the record of those last days on earth, darkening more and more into all that man can suffer, yet brightening more and more with Thy heavenly light, as the storm rose higher, and the cup had to be drunk deeper, and ever more and more terrible became the trial and shame and agony to which the Son of God was called—O Love of Christ to men, who can read all this, and feel as if Thou wert but a name, and a word of books and preachers? As if there were anything in the wide universe of such deep concern to each soul of man! "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Oh, my brethren, try to feel something of these words of the epistle. What a world of awful thoughts do they contain. He "loved me, and gave Himself for me." What thoughts to drive us into ourselves, to make us shut our eyes to the world and outward things, and ask ourselves what we are, and what we could have done, that the Son of God should have so loved us, and given Himself for us—that He should have loved us in such a way—loved us as we

love not the dearest we have on earth—loved us through that awful history of His Cross and Passion.

If it is true that so He suffered for us, and that He so loved us—and that it was necessary that, in order to show His love to us, He should so suffer for us—if it is indeed true, it is time that we should feel something of it. It is time that we should no longer be going through this life, insensible and indifferent to such a truth. It is time that we should begin to pray in earnest, that Christ would, of His love, touch and soften our hearts; that He would open our eyes to see something of what this week of His Passion means; that He would not any longer suffer us to read of the awful way in which the world was saved, without feeling the part which our sins had in crucifying Him; without feeling, too, that in that hour of sacrifice and redemption, He bore *our* souls, with those of the whole world—with all their sin, and all their danger—in His heart, in His desires, in His prayers.

XI

CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE MULTITUDES

Tuesday in Holy Week

"And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things."
—ST. MARK vi. 34.

CHRIST'S last week on earth was a ministry of love to the world. All mankind are concerned in that display of love, for all were thought of then, all were the objects of the great Sacrifice. But, besides, it was a ministry of love to all who were about Him at the time—a ministry of love to the multitudes—a ministry of love to His enemies—a ministry of love to His friends. Let us this evening consider His last week as a ministry and display of His love to the multitudes.

There are two things which especially strike us in His dealings with the crowds and multitudes, in these few days before His Crucifixion. The first is the way in which He showed Himself to them, when He entered into Jerusalem riding on the ass's colt, and accompanied by the rejoicing people bearing palms in their hands, and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son

of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Now, why did He do this? Why did He allow this outburst of feeling towards Himself, contrary to what He had always done before? Hitherto He had discouraged in the strongest manner any public display of feeling towards Himself. Those to whom He had done miracles, He strictly charged, that they should not make Him known. When the multitudes were carried away with excitement at the wonders they saw done by Him, He retired into the wilderness. But now—now that He was soon to be parted for ever from these poor lost and wandering sheep, whom He had loved so tenderly and sought so unweariedly, He seems to call forth of His own accord, their readiness to do Him homage. One last opportunity they should have of showing their simple, hearty gladness, their enthusiastic admiration of One who had done so many mighty works among them. One last holiday would He give them—as a great prince appoints a day of triumph to his people—to taste their fill of rejoicing in His presence, and to praise their glorious Master. For once, and only for this once, at this last time—now that He is on the road to the Cross—for once He will allow them to salute Him as the Son of David, as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. For once He will indulge them with the outward sight of the King of Israel riding in triumph, amid the praises of His subjects, into His royal city. Do you think that He did it for His own sake? Do you think that it was anything to Him to receive this homage—He who knew what was to follow it—He to whom the Seraphim had sung praises from everlasting? Surely

not. It was only for the sake of those multitudes whom, with all their perversity and fickleness and foolishness, He had loved and ministered to; those multitudes who were, to His eye, the image of all the crowds of lost sheep throughout the world, and through all its ages, whom He had come to seek and to save, for whom He had come down to die. It was in compassion and condescension to them that He rode in triumph into Jerusalem, that they might have one day at least of unmixed gladness, even here, in the presence of their Saviour. It was from love to them that He deigned to receive the tribute of honour and praise—the palms and boughs, the garments spread on the ass's colt, and laid down and strewed in the way for Him to pass over, the shouts and songs, the Hosannas and the welcomes. He allowed them, not because they added to His honour, but because they gave gladness to those over whom His heart yearned, and came from those whom He so deeply loved.

And so, even in triumph, He came to them as One who sought the love of the humble, and placed Himself on a level with the poor. He came, when He claimed His royal name and honour, as One whose heart is with the weak, the unknown, the lowly of this world. He came as a Conqueror and a King, but as a meek and merciful one, come to revive the heart of the downtrodden and oppressed multitudes, whom the great men of the earth had been trampling on and crushing. He was the King of the meek, not of the mighty. He was the Lord and leader of a countless host, but a host not of the proud, but of the meek and lowly. He showed what

He had meant in His words of loving comfort to the weary and the heavy laden, when He had called them to come and learn of Him, "for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Loving the meek, longing to comfort the broken-hearted, His very triumph was meant to show that though He was the Lord of Glory, He was not the less "meek and lowly in heart;" One on whom the afflicted might cast all their burdens, to whom the sorrowful might pour forth all their griefs; One who in His greatness would stoop to raise up the lowest; One who in the treasures of His boundless sympathy had comfort, counsel, strength, for the most comfortless and the most helpless.

Another point to be noticed in His dealings with the multitudes, is the increased earnestness and plainness of His speech to them and before them. It was His last opportunity of speaking to them, His last opportunity of teaching them in those wondrous words of goodness and truth and wisdom, which they had so often heard, and so often heard in vain. So at this time He, as it were, breaks through all ceremony, and teaches with a burning zeal, with a power, with an authority, which moved all who heard Him. All that He had said to them was now summed up. All the warnings He had given them, all the invitations He had set before them, were once more renewed, in different and more solemn forms. He taught now, no longer in distant Galilee, by the remote sea-shore, in the desert, or on the mountain-side; but there in the place of concourse, and the seat of wisdom, in the great centre of common worship—in the temple at Jerusalem. He, the

Lord of the temple, asserted His claim to it, and drove out those who turned it from God's house of prayer into a place of buying and selling—a place where men could defraud and cheat one another under holy names—a den of thieves. And then, speaking to the crowds who were there, He told them with new plainness and severity of speech of the dangers on the edge of which they stood. He told them of the sin and of the doom of those wicked husbandmen, who would try to take the vineyard by killing the heir, the only-begotten Son, as they had killed and persecuted all whom He had sent before. He told them of that great marriage supper prepared by the great King, to which those who were invited had refused to come, but had made light of his invitation and had gone their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise, while the rest took the king's servants, and entreated them spitefully and slew them, and brought down the vengeance of the king on themselves. He told them of the wedding feast, where one of the guests was found who had not on a wedding garment; of the King's question why he had come without the wedding garment, and how the unworthy guest was speechless; and of the doom of him who had only half obeyed the call—who had come, but had not cared to prepare himself—"Bind him hand and foot . . . and cast him into outer darkness;" and of that awful result of so much that had been done to win men to their good—"Many are called, but few are chosen." He gave His last and most solemn warning to the multitude against the sins, and the misleading teaching of their guides and leaders. In the presence of all He

denounced His woe against those who "say and do not;" who do all their works to be seen of men; who jostle and strive with one another for the seat of honour, and the title of rank, and the high place in the synagogue, the chief room at feasts, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. He denounced His woe against those who made clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they were full of all uncleanness and excess; who paid tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith; who devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers; who built the tombs of the prophets and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous, while they were lying in wait for the blood of the Prophet of prophets, the Lord of Righteousness.

This was the awful and plain-spoken warning, with which He tried to put the multitudes on their guard against the temptations and the sin, all round them. They had heard Him often, and had heard in vain. Once more He shows them the consequences of neglecting the warnings of truth and conscience; He holds up His beacon light amid the dark paths in which they were walking; He tells them of their imminent danger, and gives them one more chance to lay the truth to heart, and by it to escape the doom which was at hand. And yet, the foresight of what is to be, wrings from that heart, full of sorrow, full of wrath, and yet full of love, that despairing cry—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen

gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

And how great was the impression produced by these last pleadings of warning and departing love, we see by the manner of the multitude and the perplexity of His enemies. As He stood in the temple, doing His last miracles of mercy, the blind and the lame coming to Him and being healed, the little children praising Him, and glorifying His wonderful deeds, and crying "Hosanna to the Son of David"—during all this time the multitude "were astonished at His doctrine." It was so earnest, so awful, so full of terrible vehemence, and yet beaming throughout with the deepest love. Nowhere else do the Evangelists speak so much and so strongly of the effect of His words upon the people. They tell us of His preaching the Gospel in the temple, and how the people were very attentive to hear Him, and how the common people heard Him gladly. When the priests and scribes dared to ask Him for His authority, He sternly and at once silenced them by a question which they dared not answer. Even in the fury of their hatred, and in the fulness of their authority, they dared not touch Him, for they feared the people. We are told but a few out of the many things, in which He, for the last time, preached His Gospel to the poor, straying, ignorant crowds, whom He was leaving; but even from these few portions we can still understand how the people hung upon

His words, while He, whom they were never to hear again, spoke His farewell call to them, to flee unto the refuge of His mercy from the wrath to come.

There is one more proof of our Saviour's care and love for the multitudes which we must notice. It was in the hour of His deepest humiliation, when all the world had turned against Him, when the multitudes whom He had fed, and healed, and loved, had raised the cry, "Crucify Him." It was on His road to Calvary, where some of them, less hardened, less fickle than the rest, were following Him at a distance, in amazement and sorrow. "There followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him." Even then His thoughts were not for Himself but for them. Even then, the foresight of the troubles and anguish which were to come on these poor helpless creatures, through the sin of their countrymen, wrung His heart, and He burst out into a wail of inexpressible compassion: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." He remembered the companies which had been with Him in Galilee, for whom He had multiplied the bread; whose sons and daughters He had healed of disease and had delivered from devils; and even in His own anguish, the bitter thought of that sad and dreary blessing, the blessing of being alone and desolate, of having none to care for—"blessed are the barren, and

the wombs that never bare"—as of that being all that they would have to comfort them—made Him forget His own sufferings in their coming anguish.

And we, my brethren, what are we better than those poor wandering multitudes, whom Jesus Christ so loved? Are we more heedful, more constant, more attentive than they? Are we not really like them, easily impressed at the moment; quick to forget, to return to our selfishness, to become hardened and unfeeling, when the impression has passed away? Oh, read and listen, and lay to heart, and do not forget. Follow your Lord in these last awful days of His love and His warnings; and let them sink into your hearts, to keep them right, to keep them true, and tender, and faithful, and earnest, in the days of trial that you may have to meet. Let us not give Him cause to say to us, while we are for the moment moved by the story of His death, "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."

XII

CHRIST'S LOVE TO HIS ENEMIES

Wednesday in Holy Week

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."—ST. LUKE xxiii. 34.

WE saw yesterday how Jesus Christ behaved towards the multitudes during the last days of His ministry; how he pitied the poor, weak, wandering crowds, so easily impressed, and so easily shaken and led away—hanging on His words and exalting Him as a prophet and king one day, shouting for His death and calling down His blood on their heads the next. We saw how He condescended to give them an occasion of rejoicing, and to sympathise and associate Himself in lowly meekness with the expression of their gladness, when He allowed them to conduct Him in triumph into Jerusalem and into the temple. We saw too, how plainly and how earnestly He warned them of the dangers to come, and tried for the last time to waken up some seriousness in their minds, some real consideration of the frightful danger they were falling into by refusing to listen to the message He had brought them. To the last, we see in His words and manner to the multitudes,

His infinite compassion, His infinite love, His infinite condescension—zeal, and love, and fear, and indignation, all blending together in His feelings towards them—as He saw their helplessness and their light-mindedness, their friendlessness, with no one to care for them, their ingratitude and hardness to the only One who had ever devoted Himself to do them service, to live for them, and to die for them.

And now we will go on to consider our Lord's behaviour, in these last days, to His enemies. And it is a part of the awful history, which we should do well to observe and consider very closely. For as it is always a difficult matter to behave rightly to those who are our enemies, so we may hope for light and guidance from seeing how our Master acted in this, which is to men one of the hardest parts of their earthly trial. We can understand easily enough our Lord's tenderness and care for the poor multitudes, His affectionate love for His disciples. But towards His enemies, it would not have been so easy to have said what His ways and words would have been; towards His enemies, whose souls He loved, and for whom He was going to lay down His life, and yet who were hindering His blessed work, and helping on the kingdom and power of evil. And, therefore, when the Bible shows, at such length, what His dealings with them were, and how He treated them, it shows us the example of the most perfect goodness and truth and holiness, having to meet and struggle against the worst assaults of malice and wickedness—it shows us, in our Master's example, how

malice and wickedness are to be met by His followers.

Now, His behaviour to the Priests and Pharisees, who opposed Him so bitterly and cruelly, may be summed up in these words; He set the truth before them, He plainly told them of their sins, and He patiently bore their persecution. He taught—He rebuked, when teaching was of no use—He endured, when teaching and rebuking were of no avail.

There is one thing which is very striking in the whole of these dealings of our Lord with His enemies. If we were speaking of a mere man, we should say, it was the simple, straightforward manliness of all His behaviour to them. It is all plain, outspoken truthfulness of word and thought; all quiet, patient courage in what He does. They are opposed to Him, and He is opposed to them. They have taken the part of being His enemies, and He makes no secret that He is against them. There is no shutting of His eyes to the certainty that He and they are at deadly strife; there is no softening down, and pretending outwardly to be less enemies than is the real and inward truth. And, on the other hand, there is no attempt to exaggerate or make much of the unkindness and ill-will with which He is treated by them; to hold Himself up as a person to be pitied, as an ill-used and helpless victim. Things are left to tell their own story and to make their own impression. He does not trouble Himself to make much of them, to make them seem as bad even as they are, to claim the sympathy of the bystanders against His adversaries. What a lesson to us in our quarrels!—to us, who are so

eager to make the worst of anything in which we suffer wrong; who cannot rest till we have got other people to hear our story, to feel for our case, and to share our anger; who are so ready to pity ourselves, to make out ourselves to be injured and long-enduring sufferers; to put on the appearance of candour, and fairness, and gentleness, that our adversaries may appear to be hard, and unprincipled, and ungenerous, with all the wrong on their side. In the greatest quarrel the world ever saw between truth and hypocrisy, between goodness and malice, let us remember that He who *was* Truth and Goodness, cared not to dress up His cause even in its own real colours; neither weakly affecting a mildness of speech which was not genuine, and for which it was not the time, nor striving to blacken and make the worst of what was bad enough in itself—bad enough to be left to be judged in its own plain and naked evil.

But, as I said, there are three distinct steps to be noticed in our Lord's dealings with His enemies. First, He taught them. He began by setting them right. He placed the truth plainly before them. He explained to them their mistakes. He gave them the opportunity of seeing how they were going wrong, and of retracing their steps of falsehood and mischief. He tried what the truth would do to check and restrain them. You remember what remarkable portions of our Lord's teaching came out in these last days, in reply to His crafty and mischievous questioners. They came to Him with ensnaring questions, seeking to catch something out of His mouth, that they might use to His destruc-

tion, either before the people or the Roman governor. The answers to those questions not merely silenced them: they might, if they had been listened to, have brought home to the consciences of the questioners a clearer view of the truth they were trying to quench, a warning against the evil way on which they had entered. The Priests came asking by what authority He taught with such commanding majesty in the temple. He reminded them, in His answer, of the testimony that John the Baptist had given to Himself; the testimony of one whose words had produced such an impression on the whole nation. They came tempting Him with a question about giving tribute to Cæsar; He replied by pointing out the two great branches of duty, to the laws of man and the laws of God, and the danger of making one an excuse for breaking the other. The Sadducees came, hoping to puzzle Him about the resurrection of the dead; His solemn and awful answer, while it rebuked and put down their foolish jesting, taught us more than we might otherwise have known, of the hopes which supported the faith of the Patriarchs, which open to us a glimpse of the world to come—"They neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God."

And so, out of every veiled, ensnaring question He patiently drew forth a new lesson of saving and comforting truth. In this battle with His enemies' malice He was still mindful of their instruction; He would not miss any chance, if, by any means, He might make some impression on their minds, and show them the mischief of what they were about. And perhaps some of them may have been

struck and moved by this calm answering of truth; like the lawyer, who had begun by tempting Him, and who ended by the confession, "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth;" and of whom our Lord gave the testimony, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

But, whatever was the case with such as this lawyer, we know that the greater part were simply hardened. They were provoked by hearing the truth. The sight of our Lord's unconquerable goodness and wisdom, made them mad with envy, and hatred, and revenge. Then, when He had set before them the truth which He was come to teach, the truth about which they had asked Him questions—when He had set this truth before them for their instruction, and their salvation, and set it before them in vain—then He set before them the truth about themselves. You know how awful that truth was, and how awfully and plainly it was told them. You know those terrible denunciations of woe against the vices and sins of the rulers of the Jews which are written in the last chapters of the Gospels. Why do you think they were spoken? Why do you think they were written? Surely not as we, when we can do nothing else, break out into fierce and angry words against those with whom we are at variance. Surely not to satisfy the vain wish to speak out His mind, as we say—to annoy and vex those who would not listen to Him. No, those words must be read as the solemn sentence, pronounced against deliberate and determined wickedness, by Him who is the righteous Judge of all mankind. They were words of sorrow, and words of indigna-

tion, setting forth before the unhappy men whose desperate sins had brought this condemnation on their heads, the calm and certain sentence of that Divine Justice which they had despised and defied. And it was not spoken in a corner. It was not spoken behind their backs. Of all men in the world it was *they* who were most concerned to hear it, and to them, with all the awful majesty of the Son of man, it was probably addressed. It was spoken to them without fear or shrinking, without softening down or keeping back; spoken with an authority, before which theirs and all earthly authority must quail and bend and humble itself. It was spoken in the seat of their ill-used authority and dignity, in the place where they had scandalously corrupted the law and scriptures of God, where they had led into sin and falsehood the people to whom God had sent them to teach truth and righteousness. It was spoken to them in the audience of all the people in the temple of God. Boldly facing them in all their earthly power, in the rage of their ill-will—without diminishing anything or disguising anything when it was no longer any use to try to teach them, or to reach and touch their hearts by the light of truth—our Lord withstood them to the face, and rebuked and condemned them, without answer and without appeal.

And then He gave Himself up to them to do their worst. After that He had nothing more to say. All He could do was to let them see how He could suffer. After teaching had been thrown away, after rebuke had been in vain, He could only endure. He stood before them, in their power, and for Himself He would say nothing. They knew as well as

He knew what they had seen, what their consciences and their convictions were aware of, about the truth of His ministry and message. There was nothing more to be said, and He held His peace. They went on restlessly and uneasily asking questions and seeking witnesses, trying to find something which would satisfy their consciences, and give them an excuse, which their self-deceit might find tolerable, for indulging their revenge. But now all He had to do was to endure and keep silence. It was their hour, and the power of darkness. They were beyond His power to teach, to move, to save. They must do, as all must do, who *will* obstinately go on in sin—they must run their course out, and meet what it brings them to. But He had now no word of complaint against them, no word of reproach, no word of appeal for their mercy in the extremity of their wantonness of cruelty. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

Patient teaching and setting right; plain-spoken but solemn rebuke; silent endurance; these were the three leading marks of our Lord's behaviour towards His enemies. Yet not even in this terrible conflict had He ceased to care for them. It was His care for them that was the mainspring of what He did. It was His care for them that made Him so patient in showing them the truth. It was His care for them that made Him put the whole terrible truth about themselves before their eyes. It was His care for them that refused to provoke them further, when words were of no more avail. If He ever spoke, it

was when some opportunity offered of saying something that might perchance make them think what they were doing. If He exerted His power, it was to do some act of mercy, as when He healed the ear of the High Priest's servant. And in the agony of the Cross, those who had brought Him there were full in the view of His soul, and still the objects of His desire to save. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," were all the words He ever said of those who had hunted Him to death.

This is the picture which the Bible sets before us of Christ and His enemies; of His last dealings with them, before they were allowed to fill up the measure of their hatred, and accomplish the great Sacrifice. And even in the midst of this fierce enmity He teaches us the lesson of love; not that foolish, weak, selfish carelessness about what men are, and what they do, which is sometimes taken as if it was a proof of charity, but the love which makes a man bitterly suffer when he sees his brethren do wrong; which makes him zealous to get them to do right; which makes him suffer patiently, yet suffer bravely and with his eyes open, in the cause of truth and right. We may have to strive, we may have to rebuke; we may have to meet opposition with opposition. Christ did not yield to His enemies where right and wrong were concerned. Christ did not hold back from saying the truth about wickedness and hypocrisy, when it rose up in His path. But Christ has shown us what in the most extreme and most painful struggle of this kind we yet may do. He has shown us how we may keep our temper, and try at any rate to make our adversaries see the truth.

He has shown us that there is a way of resolute battling for what is just, and right, and holy, with the utmost zeal, and yet with the utmost calm and manly patience. And lastly, He has shown us that the issue of such contests is not in our hands; that the right and the truth may be, in appearance at least, oppressed, beaten down, defeated: that it is not the best cause that always seems to men the best, or which gains the victory; but that when all is done, there is One greater than ourselves, to whom we may safely commit the good cause, for which we can do no more. And even if it comes to the worst, and iniquity and wrong seem to have their greatest triumph, there is still a noble part left open to us, the part which our Master did not disdain to take. We may endure, and we may forgive, as He endured to the extremity of death, and as even on the Cross itself He poured forth His prayer, that His murderers might be forgiven.

XIII

THE LAST EVENING

Thursday in Holy Week

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."—
St. John xv. 14.

We have passed before our thoughts, one by one, Christ's love to the world, His love towards the multitudes, His love towards His enemies. Let us this evening fix our minds on the way in which, during the week of parting and death, He showed His love towards those whom He called His friends. "Ye are they," He said to the Twelve, and to those who more immediately attended on Him—"Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations." "Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." Our Lord then had those about Him whom He called His friends—His intimates; those whom He trusted, those whom He loved with a love over and above that which He feels to every soul which He has made; those in whose society He took delight; those from whom He looked to receive the affection and the kind duties of friends. He had those about

Him, who were not only His messengers and apostles, sent forth by His public authority as King and Saviour, but who were familiar with Him as man, who saw and knew Him when He was in private, who heard the lightest word that dropped from His lips, who witnessed and shared the hardships of His life, His labours, His trials, His thoughts and feelings about men and things round Him.

Our Lord had friends—special, intimate, familiar friends. There is nothing wonderful in a man having friends. But it is a very wonderful thought, when we remember Who our Lord was, and what He was come to do, that He should condescend to take any among men to be, not His servants and attendants, but His friends. But remember this; our Lord, as man, came to be the example of all that is good and excellent in man. And so, though not only our God in His Divine nature, but also in His human nature our Saviour and our Sacrifice, lifted up in height of dignity and greatness far above any place where the companionship of man can become Him—yet, while He was with us, living our life, suffering our lot, taking His part in our trials, He was in very earnest all that man could be without man's sin. He was troubled in mind as we are. He rejoiced in spirit as we do. He had the kindliness, the tenderness, the calm boldness, the evenness of mind, the righteous indignation, the nobleness of heart, the affectionateness and sympathy, which are the marks of excellence in the spirit of a man. And so, because friendship is an excellent thing among men, and their greatest help

to make them good, and to draw forth what is good in them, He too had His friends.

From them He was now to part, as a friend parts from those who are dear to him. And I do not know whether it is more awful, or more touching, to see the way in which the Bible points out and dwells on the exceeding overflow of love which marks His behaviour to them in these last days. For we might have thought that it was, as we should say, unnecessary. He was going soon to be glorified, to return for ever to endless bliss; to take the power which His Father had given Him, to accomplish their salvation, and to open the kingdom of heaven to them and to all believers. We might almost ask, what were these poor friends going to become to Him now that His ministry on earth was ended; now that the thought of interests so vast, so high above the concerns of a few humble followers, must have been present to His soul; now that the redemption of the whole world was about to be accomplished. We should not have been surprised if, at such a time, we had heard but little of His friends. We should have said that He had far more important things to think of. But, as I said, if it is most touching, it is also most awful—considering who He was, God as well as man—to observe the redoubling of His personal affection and tenderness and interest towards them, now that He was going to pass through death to the throne of the Father; now that He was going to be changed—from the Jesus of Nazareth, with whom they had walked about for three years, and whom they had known as the homeless and despised Man of Sorrows—into the

King of kings, and Lord of lords, the great Atonement and High Priest of mankind; to be honoured and worshipped above every name that is named in heaven and earth. Just when we might have expected special attachments and private friendships to disappear and be forgotten, in the manifestation of a vaster and more wonderful love—just at this very moment we see Jesus Christ leaving nothing undone to show to those whom He had chosen for His friends, the greatness of His care and love for them. He seems almost to care for them alone. It is as if the salvation of the world were forgotten. To give *them* comfort, to support *their* souls in the coming trial, seems the one object of His anxiety. He speaks almost as if *they* were the only souls for which He was doing His work; as if there was no one else who was the object of His thoughts; as if it was for them alone that He prayed to the Father—for them alone that He appointed His last supper, and ate His last passover; for them alone that He laid down His life. To see the way in which He who loved the whole world and came to save the world, seems at this moment to think only of His disciples, as if it was for them only that all His love and all His salvation were meant—when we see this, we begin to have some faint understanding how it is that the Almighty Maker and Preserver of the world, who sees, and who upholds all things from everlasting to everlasting, yet has His eye on each one of us—how He cares for each of our souls, how He notes every thought and judges every deed, how He sends every trial and remembers every grief, and even numbers every hair of our heads.

Observe how carefully all these touches and marks of affection towards His friends are recorded in the Gospels. The history of this last week opens with the account of the supper in Bethany, the supper at the house of Lazarus, Martha and Mary—of Martha and Mary, of whom it is particularly said that He loved them and their brother—of Lazarus, of whom He Himself speaks to His Apostles as "our friend Lazarus." And there was that display of what some of His disciples thought the profuse and extravagant affection of the sister of Lazarus, who poured the costly spikenard ointment on His feet, wiping them with her hair; who thought nothing too good, or good enough for her to offer, nothing too humble for her to do for Him who had sorrowed with her sorrow, and wept with her tears, and who had restored to her her brother from the grave. And we see how He received it. He received it as it was offered, and would not allow her to be blamed. He received it as one friend receives a mark of love from another, especially when that mark of love is also a token and warning of approaching parting. "Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this."

So the week began, and throughout it we may observe how freely, when there was an opportunity, Christ opened Himself to His disciples. The early part of the week was filled up with what belonged to His public ministry to the Jews. And then, when that was at an end, He gave His last day uninterrupted to pour forth His whole soul with those whom He had called His friends. "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew

that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." For this one last day He speaks to them and of them, as if they only were "His own;" as if He had none others but they to claim the title of "His own;" none others to whom to shed forth His love, none others to divide with them His interest. Then came the washing of the feet. The Master and Lord, knowing all the time that He came from God and was going to God, girded Himself to do the office of a servant, to show them what He was willing to do for them, to light up among them by His wonderful example, a keener, brighter, more intense flame of mutual affection and mutual readiness to do all offices of love. He did it to show them, not only that there was no depth to which He was not willing to stoop for their sake, but also that offices of love consist, not merely in the actual benefits and helps which we give to one another, but in the way and manner in which we render them. There was no particular gain to the Apostles in having their Lord to wash their feet; the gain was in the generosity, the self-forgetting affection, with which the thing was done.

Then came that long and intimate conversation, in which He showed with what deep anxiety He regarded the stedfastness of their affection to Himself, their perseverance and strength in trial, their understanding of the blessings in store for them, their comfort, and peace, and hope. The thought that one of them He must lose, that one of them would leave Him for His enemies, was enough to

bow Him down, on the very eve of the Cross. "When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." We see in the way in which this last exchange of confidence and affection between Him and His disciples is described, we see in the slight and passing incidents of it which are mentioned, how close and endearing was the friendship of Christ with His disciples. We see a disciple, of whom it is specially written that Jesus loved him, leaning on his Master's bosom. When the announcement that one of the Twelve should betray Him, had startled and shaken them, and they feared to hear the name of the traitor, Simon Peter beckoned to that other disciple, that he should ask who it should be of whom Jesus spake. And he, we read, "lying on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it?" What a story of tenderness, of confiding sympathy, of affectionate familiarity, is told us in these few words. How the mere description of the beloved disciple leaning, as his regular and accustomed place, on his Master's bosom—falling back on his Master's breast to ask the sad secret—shows the way in which the Master had made His disciples feel some of His deep love and care for them. And then observe, as the conversation proceeds, not only how the matter of it shows the same yearning affection, but the very words and turns of the sentences witness the same. See how He tells them of His approaching departure. "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." As if they were the only persons for whom He was so anxious; as if His one thought was, that they should keep up in the midst of an alien and unsympathising world, the love which had been in that little company while He was with them. And yet it was no weak, flattering, too indulgent love that He showed them. He welcomed the return of their affection, but not blindly; not without showing as much anxiety about their weakness, and as much compassion for it, as He showed the desire to draw forth their devotion to Him. "Simon Peter said unto Him, Lord, whither goest Thou?" Christ accepted Peter's zealous love, but He knew Peter's infirmity, and waived for the moment the trial of faith which He knew would be too much for the Apostle to bear. "Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." Then, when Peter's fiery self-confidence in his own strength of purpose—"Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake"—had brought down from the Master, who knew and loved him better than he knew himself, the restraining but unheeded check, given so earnestly, and yet given in vain, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice;"—when the loving Master had, in grave and affectionate warning, thrown a necessary damp on the eagerness of His

friend, He goes on, to make up for the discouragement, by the promise of a comfort greater than the approaching trouble. Their hearts might well be troubled by the announcement of His departure, and by the warning that one of them should betray Him. Peter might well be troubled, to be told that his boasted affection was weaker than he supposed, and that it would end in denying his Master. So to support those, whom it had been necessary first to sober and to subdue, He goes on, "Let not your heart be troubled;" let it not be troubled in spite of all that I have told you: "ye believe in God, believe also in Me." And then comes the promise of the many mansions in His Father's house, which He was going to prepare for them. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." And so, through their questions and His answers—questions from different ones of their number, from Philip, from Thomas, from Judas, He is led on, step by step, to that great announcement of His never-ceasing Presence with them, and of the coming of the Heavenly Comforter to be their guide and enlightener, which was meant, in the first instance, for their comfort only, but to which, more perhaps than to any other part of Holy Scripture, every Christian has turned in times which needed something more than ordinary support and consolation. We see how these words of love told on the Apostles. They could not restrain themselves from crying out, "Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." They could not resist

this strange, perhaps to the whole number, this new and unexpected freedom and familiarity of His conversation with them. It carried them away. Again they had to be cautioned about their ignorance of themselves, again to be cheered by the assurance of final triumph. "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone." Yet "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

I have said that the love of Christ to His friends, in these last days, is shown with such deep affection, that it is as if He had no one else to love and care for. Just consider some of the sentences in that last prayer for them, just before He went forth into the garden of Gethsemane. "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word . . . I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me . . . Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we are . . . Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me . . . O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee; but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

This is the way in which Christ loved them. He desired that the love wherewith the Father loved Him might be in them. I have touched, this evening, only on one part of the account which is given us of Christ's ministry of love towards His friends. I need hardly remind you of how much more there is told us. I need not remind you of that which is the great event of this day, when He broke the bread, and poured the wine, and gave them His Body and His Blood ; and left them and us a never-ceasing remembrance of His dying love, in His holy Sacrament. I need not remind you how in the hour of agony and temptation He still watched over them, as a mother watches, indulgently and yet so anxiously, over her weak and wayward child. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." I need not remind you of that look of love, which He turned on Peter, in the moment of his denial, which carried repentance to the Apostle's heart. I need not remind you of the dying scene on the Cross, when He commended His mother to His beloved Apostle : "Woman, behold thy son !"—him who is come in My place, to be to thee what I was ; and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother !" I must be satisfied with having pointed out the subject to you. You will find it in the Gospel, in the history of our Lord's last week.

And, now, what do we learn from this ? That the Apostles were favourites of Christ, such as it is impossible for any one else to be ? That they had exclusive possession of their Master's love and sympathy ? The Gospel would be written in vain if it

were so. No ; it was written to give us a proof, such as our own hearts could make us understand, of how our Redeemer loves those who are to Him what the Apostles were, earnest and true-hearted followers. "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." You see how Christ really feels towards those of the sons of men whom He takes to be His friends. You too may be the objects of that anxious care that the Twelve were. If you will give yourselves to Him, as they did, you may read in those wonderful scenes how your Redeemer will deal with you. You may be weak, as the Apostles were, and He may have to warn you. You may be self-confident, and He may check you. You may be unstable, and He may not take all your words for what you think them. You may be ignorant, and He may have much to teach you. You may have got into mistaken ways, and He may have much to do to cure you. You may want strengthening, and He may have to call you through a fiery trial to harden you. But for you, too, it is written, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

XIV

THE RETURN TO CHRIST'S LOVE

Good Friday

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"—ISAIAH v. 3, 4.

WE have tried to follow, during the evenings of this week, the love of Christ, as shown in the history of His Passion. We have tried to fix our thoughts on His love to the world; on His love to the multitudes who followed Him, and saw His miracles and heard His words; on His love to His enemies; on His love to His friends. Now let us this evening consider the return made to that love of our Redeemer; the return made by the multitudes—the return made by His enemies—the return made by His special and familiar friends, and, lastly—the return made by the world which He has redeemed.

1. What was the return made by the multitudes?—the multitudes who had seen His mighty works, who had been for the time so struck and impressed by His words—the multitudes who had borne witness

to the raising of Lazarus, who had been carried away by their admiration and enthusiasm for Christ, and had hailed Him as their prophet—the multitudes who had rejoiced in Him as the Son of David and King of Israel, as He rode in the midst of them into Jerusalem—the multitudes who had heard Him so gladly teaching in the temple, and had hung on His lips, and who, for the time, would not let the Jewish rulers touch Him—the multitudes whom He had regarded with such compassion and love, and for whom He had never spared Himself labour and trouble. How did they requite His love? When they saw Him in the hands of His enemies they changed their minds about Him, and were ready to believe those who told them that He was a false prophet and an impostor. It was they—these foolish, thoughtless, ungrateful multitudes—who were made the instruments of His Crucifixion. By themselves, His enemies could not have brought about His destruction. By themselves, the priests could not have prevailed on Pilate to condemn Him to death. If it had been only the chief priests, Pilate would have released Jesus and crucified Barabbas. But the chief priests were able to persuade and stir up the multitudes; and it was the multitudes, by their wild, fierce cries, who frightened Pilate into giving up Jesus to death. Pilate would have let Him go, but "the multitude, crying aloud, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. And the chief priests moved the people that he should rather release Barabbas unto them." It was the multitudes who answered to Pilate's question, What should he do to Jesus, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." It was the

multitudes who cried with one voice, "Not this man, but Barabbas," "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas." It was they who "were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified." It was for fear of them that Pilate, seeing "that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made . . . took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." It was the multitude who shouted that terrible answer, "His blood be on us, and on our children." This was the return made Him by the crowd, by the multitudes. True, they had listened to Him, and had been moved by His heavenly teaching. But the moment after, they got tired of Him, and were just as ready to listen to His destroyers. And what they did was to lend their voices to the enemies of Christ, and help them to have Him crucified. Not all, perhaps, who had hailed Him on Monday as their King, on the Mount of Olives, joined in the cry on Friday, "We have no king but Cæsar;" but of all that crowd, not one voice was raised to testify to the innocence of Christ, not one was honest and brave enough to witness to His goodness. All who did not shout for His death, or revile and mock Him, kept silence, and were afraid to say a word for Him.

2. What was the return made by His enemies for that sincere and unfeigned love that sought to open their eyes, and hold them back from the wickedness on which they were bent,—that love which, if it could not alarm their consciences by the awful vision of the truth which it had disclosed to them, was yet ready to forgive them, ready to die for

them? From these there was only one return to be expected. For the truth which He had told them they paid Him back with a double and intenser hatred. For the way in which He had proved His own innocence, and goodness, and wisdom, against their plausible and ensnaring attempts to find it at fault, they resolved all the more that the holier and more unblamable He appeared, the more obstinately would they refuse to acknowledge Him, the more certainly should He perish. There is nothing to be the least surprised at in this. Though Jesus Christ was Goodness and Truth itself, though no one could find cause of blame in Him, though the priests and scribes must have seen what we see, and must have felt in their secret hearts that He was right and they were wrong, yet it is not the least wonderful that they acted as they did. When once men begin by hardening themselves against what they cannot but feel to be truth — when once they begin refusing to acknowledge goodness to be goodness, and insist, in spite of their better thoughts, that it is evil—when once they begin twisting and bending all proofs of excellence into signs of falsehood and evil—they have entered on an evil path which will lead them deeper and deeper into contradiction against God and truth. Each step, as it convicts them of having lied to their own hearts and souls at first, makes it harder for them to return on their ways—to confess, and give up, and cast away the falsehood and slander to which they have openly committed themselves. They can but go forward and fight out their terrible fight against goodness to the end. They can but try and blind their own

eyes to the certainty that it *is* truth and goodness against which they are fighting. And so these enemies of Christ, who had set down His works of mercy to the devil, could not, for very shame, be brought to unsay their words, for any rebuke which He could address to them. They must go on and treat Him as an impostor. They were condemned to it by what they had said against Him before; by the ground on which they had put their opposition to Him before the multitudes, and their refusal to listen to His message. They could but make the return they did; and stop their ears against all He could say, and shut their eyes against all that might persuade them to change their minds; and persecute Him with all the bitterness of an evil conscience, even to the death.

3. There is nothing, alas! surprising in the fierceness and merciless hatred of the rulers of the Jews. They stood up against the Best and the Holiest; and it is no wonder that, in such a contest, the evil showed itself as great as the good which it contradicted and opposed. But what return for His love was made by those friends on whom He had lavished the treasures of a love and tenderness without example? Where were they, and what were they doing, when the hour came to try their faithfulness, their constancy, their promises of standing by Him to the last? In vain their Master warned them over and over again to watch and pray lest they should enter into temptation. In vain, in the midst of His own agony of prayer, He interrupted His supplications to the Father for Himself, that He might go back to those whom He had left to

pray, that He might keep them from sinking into careless slumber. Once and again He found them sleeping. Not for one hour could they watch with Him, though they knew that His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. In vain had He told them beforehand that they should all be offended in Him. They could not dream of such a thing; they took it as an undeserved reproach, and resented it as men do when their faith and courage are doubted. "Peter answered and said unto Him, Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended. . . . Likewise also said all the disciples." In vain the repeated and still more solemn caution: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter seems as if he did not want his Master's prayers, as if he felt himself strong enough to do without them. "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." In vain the merciful warning to him that he did not know his weakness; the prediction that he would at last come to denying that he even knew his Master. It was all in vain: love, and confidence, and prayers, and warnings. The traitor came, the officers of the Jews appeared. The disciples, some of them at least, would have fought for Him if He had pleased; but to stand by, and share His danger, and suffer with the Lord, this they had not the faith to do. "Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled." At the first approach of danger all their brave speeches were forgotten. All the great things which they would dare in His company, and

for His sake, shrink into selfishness and panic fright. The utmost any dared to do was to follow with trembling and timid anxiety the band which had carried away their Master; to steal unnoticed into the hall of judgment to catch a glimpse of Him. But the moment that even the bravest of them is challenged as belonging to Christ, the moment the least suspicion is excited that he has been with that great and loving Master—that moment he sinks back into abject terror, and his only thought is how to seem to have nothing to do with Him. Peter, to whose faith the rest had been entrusted—Peter, whom nothing could stagger and frighten—Peter, who had boasted that he, at least, would stand faithful, even if he stood alone—Peter is like the miserable and cowardly accomplice of the convicted criminal who cares not what becomes of his companion, and only thinks how he may himself escape. Oh! do not wonder at this. Cannot you remember in your own life, brave resolutions and miserable fulfilments; promises which seemed easy to make, but which turned out so hard to keep? Cannot you remember what a picture you have sometimes drawn in your own mind of your intended resistance to temptation; how nobly and faithfully you imagined yourself, in your thoughts beforehand, sorely tried and proudly triumphing over the temptation; and cannot you remember too, after the storm of temptation had passed over you, what a miserable show you had actually made, how lightly you had been overcome, with what wretched weakness, and stupidity, and folly, you had been provoked, or terrified, or enticed from your strong purposes of

good? In the Apostles we but see the reflection of our own doings towards our Master. But mark it well—this was the return for all the love which Christ had shown to those whom He called and treated as His familiar friends.

4. But the most important question still remains. They, of whom we have been speaking, were, after all, but a few men out of a single generation. They are gone to give up their account; and with their unthankfulness we have no concern, except to learn by it. But Christ's love was not for them alone. We began this week by considering His mercy to the world. What return has the world rendered Him for the love of Holy week, the love of Gethsemane and of Calvary? How has the world repaid the love by which it was redeemed? How has the world repaid it during the more than eighteen hundred years during which it has known it? It has bowed before Him. It has accepted His Gospel. It has made His Cross the most honourable of its emblems and badges, and placed it, sparkling with jewels, on the crowns of kings. But was this outward earthly honour what Christ sought in return for His love to men? What He suffered for, was to make men better. He showed His inexhaustible love that men might learn to love one another as their Master had loved them. He despised the shame, that men might be no more proud. He accepted the cup of pain, that men might be turned from the pleasures of sin. He gave up all possessions and delights of this world, that men might not be greedy and live only for money. He endured the Cross, that they might cut off the right hand and

pluck out the right eye, rather than sin. He died, to make them believe in a future judgment, and in everlasting life. And how has the world learnt the lesson? Is the face of it changed since His coming? Have those multitudes, for whom He died, left off their sins? Think of the countless numbers of men, who have heard, and read, and talked of the marvellous story of Christ's love to men: and then think of the way in which they have lived—of the way in which they are living now. Think of what we all know of the sins which abound and flourish in the world. Think of the way in which fashion and custom make some sins seem to many almost necessary, and find excuses for others. Think of what we hear every day, and what we experience, of the way in which the course of the world goes on, no one having the power to stop or mend it, right in the face of the clearest laws and words of Christ—goes on as if Christ had never come, and the Cross had never been heard of among men. Think of that dreadful truth, the wickedness of the world: think of the hardness and boldness of the bad, the weakness and imperfection of the good. And, according as we are able to take in the vastness and depth of the fact itself, we shall be able to measure the return which mankind has made, to that infinite love of Christ, which stooped from heaven as low as to shame and death, to raise up the souls of His creatures from their self-chosen misery and sin.

And we are part of the world—part of that world, which *as a whole* has made no better return to Christ than the multitudes, the chief priests, the disciples; which still crucifies Him afresh with sins

multiplied and repeated every day; which is as changeable as the multitudes, as deep in its dislike to Christ's holiness of life, as the chief priests; as ashamed of Him, and terrified at His Cross, as the disciples. And what are we? What return are we, personally, making to our Redeemer's love? We know the only return He cares for;—a life, which helps, so far as it goes, to make this world really His kingdom—a life which follows Him, trying to reproduce in its own course some shadow of His love, His tenderness, His godliness, His humility, His mercy, His hatred of sin, His courage for the truth—a life in which He lives again in the souls of His servants and followers—a life in which the Cross is set up, for our pride, our unkindness, our selfishness, to be nailed to—a life in which we are neither ashamed, nor afraid, to have our portion, to risk our all, with Christ. Oh, let us think whether we are trying to make that return. We have, it may be, been moved by the freshening up in our thoughts at this time, of the remembrance of His love to man. I am sure it is not wonderful if it has been so with any of us. How we can listen to it without grief and shame and indignation against ourselves, is the only wonder. But, my brethren, it is not your being touched, which is the question—it is the return—the real, solid, living return for a love, which is no cunningly-devised fable, but was once real suffering, and is still living care for you—it is the return for this love which is what we have to think about: whether in our lives we will slight Christ, hate Him, be afraid of Him; or whether in our lives we will hold fast, as to our dearest treasure,

to the remembrance of His love; whether Christ Crucified shall be the real guide, pattern, comfort, of our days; whether by His Cross we will crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, and by it be crucified to the world and the world to us; whether we will in sincerity try to follow that goodness and holiness which Christ showed in His life and in His death. This is the real question which the season and the day leaves with us. May we seek at the feet of the Crucified Saviour how to answer it aright. May He shed abroad His love in our hearts by which alone we can understand and copy His love. We cannot tell how He means us to take up our cross and follow Him. But let us beseech Him, by His love and His death, to give us grace to be not utterly unworthy followers of our Master—to follow Him through His love and His humility to a death of peace; to follow Him through a death hallowed and guarded by His presence to the glory of His Resurrection.

XV

THE WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Good Friday

"And sitting down they watched Him there."—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 36.

WE have heard read to-day, and some of us have also heard during the week, what Scripture tells us of that awful day, when the Son of God, the only-begotten, was nailed to the Cross for our sins. I will not add to that any words of my own. I will only employ a few minutes this morning, in drawing a lesson from it for our use. Jesus Christ's death on the Cross was not only a Sacrifice for our sins, but was also part of His great Example. He there taught us how to suffer. Suffer, we all must, one day or another. Suffer, we probably shall, in those last hours and days when body and soul are going to part. Blessed be the mercy of Jesus Christ that He has taught us how to suffer; that He deigned to go along that painful road, to cheer and light us amid its bitter trials; and let us for a few minutes watch Him suffering. Let us listen to the few words which came from those patient and holy lips, that we may learn something of the spirit in which,

when our hour of suffering comes, we ought to take it.

1. We may very possibly have to suffer through the fault of others; or, when we are suffering, it is possible that others may be hard or unkind to us. We may be sick, and our friends may neglect us. We may be helpless, and our friends may take advantage of our weakness to overreach us, to do us an ill turn, to put out our hopes. We may become, from weakness of body, fretful and impatient, and see all that others do in a bad light; we may think them rough and hard even in their waiting on us; we may think that they do not try to enter into, and feel for our sorrows and pains, that they do not care about seeing us suffer. When those trials and temptations come, let us stop and think of Him who was nailed to the Cross. What were His first words when the nails had pierced His hands and feet, when the Cross was set up, when the malice of His enemies had at length compassed what it sought, when the cup of agony was full? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Jesus forgave the murderers who crucified Him. Jesus made an excuse for their cruel malice. Oh, lay up these words in your souls. They may one day, when you are provoked, come back to your thoughts, and save you from sin, save you from offending Christ by being unforgiving even to the unkind—much more by ascribing and imputing unkindness and neglect, when perhaps it was only your own fancy and weakness that imagined them.

2. When we suffer, we generally think only of ourselves. We think that we have enough to bear

without troubling ourselves about the wishes or sorrows of others. Sorrow makes most of us selfish. The man who is sick has little sympathy or care to spare for his neighbour, who perhaps is down in sickness too. His own pain is enough to take up his thoughts. He even gets angry, and thinks people unfeeling if they seem to expect that he should have thought, when he is ill, for what others like, or take interest in, or wish. But watch Jesus Christ on the Cross. Watch Him after that long morning of racking agony to nerve and to spirit. Wearied, worn, exhausted, dying, He sees His mother, and the disciple whom He loved. In His own bitter suffering, He sees how they are suffering; He thinks of them, He thinks of what would be a comfort and support to them. He thinks how He shall knit together the ties of love more closely between those whom He leaves behind. "Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!" In the extremity of His agony, those whom He loved in the days of peace are as strongly as ever present to His thoughts. He thinks of their needs when no one thinks of Him. He ministers with the sweet voice of love, now that He can no more minister with hand or action; He ministers in the hour of death, to those for whom He can do no more than make them love each other more tenderly for His sake.

3. Nor did He think only of those who belonged to Him—His mother, and His disciples. There was a poor wretched criminal, a murderer and a robber, the outcast and offscouring of society, hanging at His side, hung there, to do Him greater

dishonour—to show Him to the world as worthy to die with the vilest malefactors. Yet, in the midst of His own torments, amid the jeers and brutal mockery of this miserable man's companion, He was willing to receive and be favourable to this poor creature's petition. He was willing to think of him, to think of what would give him comfort, to own him as His companion, not only in shame and death, but in His heavenly kingdom. That racked and forlorn being, who was dying without hope, dying with the dreadful consciousness of all his sins, ventured to ask the pity of Jesus Christ, ventured to ask Him to vouchsafe a ray of comfort in that dreadful hour, ventured to intrude his miserable case, though Jesus Christ was dying in torments of His own. And how did He receive him? How should we like, in moments of pain, in the hour of death, to be asked to consider the wants, and to minister to the comfort of an outcast, friendless soul, all its lifetime abandoned to hardened sin? We dare not answer for ourselves. We dare not think what we should do. But we know what the Redeemer did. We know how, in His hour of desolation, He showered comfort, hope, forgiveness, promise, about the dreadful death-struggle of him who had not a friend in the world besides. We know that He did not grudge him words that the greatest saints would have hailed with rapture—"To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

4. To most of us, pain and sickness seem to bring a release from ordinary duties. We feel ourselves free from the obligations which lie on us in health. We think we need not be so strict. We

think that pain, or headache, or sickness, is a good reason for not saying our prayers, for not doing things in so orderly a way as at other times. How glad are we sometimes that we have an excuse in an ailment for leaving things undone that give us trouble. How ready are we to make sickness stand as an answer to any one who urges us to exert ourselves, not to give way, but to try and do something. How hard-hearted we think our friends when they expect us to go on doing things in the midst of pain and sickness. It *is* hard to do them. It is one of the great trials of suffering, that it makes us indifferent to what becomes of us, careless of our duties, and of other people who depend upon us. But in those times, think of Jesus Christ on the Cross. He thought of fulfilling to the uttermost all that was appointed Him. It had been said of Him that He was to drink the vinegar, so He asked for it. He said, "I thirst." All that was written He would accomplish. When the vinegar was given Him, He bowed His head and meekly received it, as He received every other part of the cup that His Father had given Him to drink. He did not put it from Him as a needless, useless interruption in the midst of racking pain and faintness. He would not go till He could say, "It is finished."

5. There is one strange and awful sentence of those which He spoke on the Cross which we must sometimes have wondered at. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" How could God forsake Him? How could He doubt whether God had forsaken Him? How could He make us suppose that His trust in God was shaken? Surely it

was not that; surely those are not the words of despair and mistrust. What they fully mean, it would be dangerous to ask, for they are the words of the Incarnate Son of God in man's nature. But no more comforting words than they, to our poor, weak, fainting nature, were spoken on the Cross. Who does not faint and sink under the cross which God lays on him? Who does not sometimes feel that he is alone in the world, with none to help him, none to uphold him? Who does not feel sometimes as if even the comfort and hope of religion are not enough to bear him up? And yet does it not seem as if none but the faithless and the despairing could have such doubts, could feel such desolation? Oh, let us thank our merciful Saviour that He has shown us that these words, which are sometimes forced by trouble from our lips, need not be words of impatience and unbelief. Man cries out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"—and then doubts whether he has not said something very wrong; he fears lest he has charged God foolishly, and disbelieved in the goodness of God. The Psalmist, David, cried out in his distress, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and we feel how often the thought rises to our hearts, though it seems faithless to utter it. But here, on the Cross, Jesus Christ utters the same cry as His weak and fainting creatures. He takes David's words in the Twenty-second Psalm and makes them His own;—not to teach us to cry out against God; not to teach us to distrust God; not to encourage us to give way to hard thoughts of our Father in heaven; but to give us comfort, that if we have such feelings rushing

into our minds sometimes, they need not be wrong ones, unless we make them so by our impatience and repining and want of faith. He would give us comfort by showing us that those dark clouds, those dreary feelings of being forsaken, those bitter moments of a gloom which seems—seems, though it is not—without end or light or hope, have been shared, have been suffered from, by Him who was the Son of the Father; by Him who, while on the Cross, was yet One with the Father.

6. Thus He has shown us how to suffer. Thus He has shown us how to be patient, forgiving, considerate, thoughtful for the comfort of others in the midst of our pain and trouble. Thus He has shown us that when we most want pity from our brethren, we must still have love and kindness to spare for them. And now I have mentioned all the sayings of Jesus Christ on the Cross except one—the last words that He spake, the words with which He departed from the world,—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," and having said this, He gave up the ghost. There He has taught us how to die. Say what we will, death is an awful parting. We love life, and it is hard to take leave of it, hard to lay it down. But here is our lesson. Let these words of Jesus Christ ever be in our hearts while we are in health, that they may be ready to come to our lips when we are dying. We must learn to say them from our hearts, in the hours of pain and sickness, that we may learn to say them as Christ said them when the spirit is almost gone. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Oh, treasure up these words against the hour when you will need to use

them. Perhaps you may be called away when you are young, and feel how hard, how sad it is to die before your time, before you have lived your fair share of years. It is a trial to reconcile your mind to this early giving up of the light of life; but look to your Saviour. He teaches you how to feel, He teaches you how to meet the trial. He teaches you by His blessed example to resign yourself to the Will of your Father, and to be sure that that Will is love. He teaches you to trust to the full His goodness, even to the last; He puts the words into your mouth, of resignation and confidence in His care and love—"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Ah, and it does not need to be young to feel the bitterness of parting. We do not lose our love of life, our value for it, as we grow old. We need the lesson of resignation, the learning to be willing to give up, in God's appointed time, the life that He gave us; we need that lesson to the last. In these words let us study it; in these words let us try and learn it, that when the time comes, it may be our comfort and support that we are able to say from our hearts, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Let us offer our life and all that we have to God while we are strong. Let those words be our last words every evening when we lie down to rest; and then, by God's grace, it will not perhaps be so much of a surprise, it will not be so bitter and heart-breaking, when the time comes that we must take leave of life in good earnest. And Christ will give us faith and trust to commit ourselves without fear to the mercy of Him who sent His Son to die for us.

May Christ our Redeemer think upon us all in the time of our tribulation, in the hour of suffering, in the hour of death ; may He think of His sufferings, and give us grace to suffer with Him, to suffer in His spirit. In the agony of death may He be near us to teach us how to die and to receive our spirit.

XVI

GOD'S GREAT DAY

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."—PSALM cxviii. 24.

THIS is indeed "the day which the Lord hath made." No such day has been like it since the world began. No such day of wonderful change in the hopes of men. No such day of turning back all that had continued to be since the beginning of the creation. No such day of the stretching forth of God's mighty arm to save and help mankind. No such day of sure and solid gladness; gladness which need fear no disappointment and no end. There had been shadows and likenesses of this great day of power and of joy. Under the Old Testament men had seen in figure the Day of Christ, and had rejoiced. Such a day was that when Noah looked forth after the Flood, upon a world new born, and was called once more to a happier and brighter life. Such a day was that when a son was born to the childless house of Abraham, and such a day was that when the late born, and only son, the heir of all the promises, doomed to die, was given back from death. Such a day was that, when Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from among the strange people

—that early morning watch, when Israel and their enemies passed together through the Red Sea, Israel to their unhoped-for deliverance, Pharaoh to his grave. But those days were but faint types of this day. They were but its promise, its outward and visible sign. The deliverance was but for a while. The joy was great, but it was joy for that which was only of this life. They who rejoiced died, and their rejoicing died with them. But the deliverance of to-day is for ever. It is a deliverance not for one family, or one people, but for all the tribes of human kind, that ever have been, and that ever will be. It is a change from darkness to light, from fear to hope, from death to endless life, for the world at large. Those who first heard of it, and rejoiced, are long since gathered to their rest; but others came after them, to whom it was just as really a cause of joy, as to the women who were early at the tomb; and to us in the end of time, separated by eighteen hundred years from the Apostles and followers of the risen Son of God, His rising again is quite as much a matter to encourage us to triumphant faith, to comfort us in trouble and in death, as it was to them. Great indeed is the day of the Lord; the Light which broke on men on that third day, shines as brightly to all believing hearts now as it did on St. Peter and St. John, not a mere remembrance of past glory and gladness, but an unfailing and uninterrupted spring of present hope and strength. And it will shine long after we are gone, to cheer the hearts and raise the joy of our children, and of all the unborn generations to the end of the world.

We have read to-day what the Resurrection was

to those to whom its news first came, to the women, to the Eleven, to the rest of the disciples. We know the gracious message, "Fear not ye." We know how they saw and believed; we know that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. And we have heard too, what effect the thought of the Resurrection had on those early disciples of our Lord. We have heard how it made St. Paul cry out, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." These were the feelings, these were the thoughts, which came into the minds of the first believers in Christ. They felt how much they had to do with the Resurrection; they felt what a strange and blessed change it had made in all their life, in all that they did, in all that they cared for, in all that they looked forward to. It had weaned them from sin; it strengthened them, day by day, in all holiness and love. By it they went on from strength to strength, holding by the hand of that Mighty One who had burst the bars of death. By it they felt that they were safe for ever from fear of evil; safe from the troubling of the wicked; safe for eternity, at the very moment when death seemed to swallow them up. By it they lay down to die as they lay down to sleep—sure that in the very grave they should meet with Him, who had been dead, and was alive again—sure that in the darkness and shadow of death His light would

arise upon them. These were their feelings, these were their thoughts. The Resurrection had changed everything to them, and they lived as men to whom this world had become nothing except a place to live in holily, where they might love and serve their brethren, and wait patiently God's will, till their call came to that world and home which was to be for ever.

And what is this great day of the Lord to us? Christ's Resurrection is still all that it was to them; it has not become less important by the passage of years; its virtue is not diminished, its grace and power are not worn out. If Christ had indeed risen this very morning, His Resurrection would not be in reality of more concern to us than it is now. Christ is risen; risen never to die again, to be for ever that which He was the first moment when He conquered death. He is there above, the Saviour who could not be kept in captivity by the grave; the very same who spoke to Mary Magdalene, and reproved the doubting Thomas, and talked on the way to Emmaus, and broke bread on the sea-shore. And what was true of Him then is true now; what could be said of Him then can be said now; what He did then for those who loved Him and believed Him, He can do now; what they felt towards Him—the rejoicing and the glorying trust, and the conquering comfort and strength—it is ours, my brethren, ours to choose whether we shall not feel it too. "Old things," says the Apostle, "are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The Resurrection was a call, a call louder than that of the trumpet on Mount Sinai, to newness of life and newness of hope. It called men of old when it was first

preached; it calls men still, now that its remembrance never ceases among us. It calls aloud to newness of life, it calls on the sinner and the careless to arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; it cries aloud, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Christ is risen to make us holy, to make us live for ever. We must be holy, or we cannot breathe in heaven; and therefore He has risen, that we may become holy. Shall we any longer go on lying dead in our trespasses and sins, refusing to hear that gracious voice which says to us, in the very grave of our sin, Arise, and come forth? Shall He speak to the dead body of Lazarus, and shall it obey Him, and shall He speak in vain, when He calls to the hearts and souls of living men to arise and follow Him? Christ is risen; He has left the corruption of the grave; and shall we still go on, clinging to the uncleanness and pollution of death, to the shame and misery of an evil conscience? Christ is risen, He is gone up to that holy place where the angels are in peace, where nothing that defiles can ever enter, where there is no thought but that of love, where there is no wish except the wish to do God's will; where no stain of impurity, no rising of anger, spoils and ruffles the calm of heaven. And shall we, calling ourselves by the name of Christ, be still sunk in those accursed and forbidden things, which Christ died and rose in order to save us from? Shall we not say to ourselves, Christ is risen for me; how can I be angry, and bear a bitter grudge against my brother? Christ is risen for me, shall I not cast off my drunkenness and gluttony,

and try to make a new beginning, and separate myself from these abominations? Christ is risen for me, the Lord of truth is risen, to overthrow the falsehoods of Satan, and shall I dare to lie to my brother, to deceive him, to make advantage out of him? Christ is risen, His body is glorified, pure as the light, more glorious than the sun; and shall I let my body, which He rose to save and to make like His body, shall I let it be the habitation of filthy and evil desires, shall I make it the instrument of the devil? Shall I speak proud, and ill-natured, and slanderous words—I, for whom Christ has risen—I, whom Christ is calling from His throne of glory to mount up and follow Him? Christ is risen; He has been, as it were, new born from the grave, made new for us; shall we not, now at least, though it is so late, still *now*, if we have not before, separate ourselves from all that we know to be unholy and sinful, and no longer dishonour each Easter as it comes back, by still going on in our old, wicked, heathen ways? Surely now we must feel, amid the rejoicings of Easter, that it is utterly unfit to keep the Feast with the old leaven of malice and wickedness; surely now we must feel that nothing becomes the disciples of the Risen Saviour but a heart and mouth which are striving earnestly to leave off all evil things. Oh, let us beware that we bring not our unrepented and obstinate sin into the congregation of the Lord, on His great day, to provoke Him to double jealousy. Let us remember that Christ's Resurrection not only shows that He is gone up to be our Saviour, but that He has received all power and authority to come back to be our Judge.

Christ's Resurrection calls us not only to begin a new life, but to go on with it, with renewed zeal and carefulness, if by His grace we have begun it. It reminds us once more how mighty to save, how unwearied to uphold and help, is He whom we have got for our Leader and Guide through life. Not as the children of Israel, who had only Moses to depend upon to direct them. Moses was great, and strong, and meek, and God's blessing was with him; but Moses was but a man, of like passions with themselves, who could fall, who did fall in the time of sharp trial. Not so He, who leads on His people now from strength to strength, from victory to victory, from one newness of life to another. He, if we are trusting Him, is One who has broken the bands of death, who is in truth the Watcher of our way, and the Director of our steps; He is One who has endured and conquered—endured all, and conquered all—to lend us of His strength, to feed our faintness with His renewed life, to show us of that truth and light which He has won for men. We have only to go to Him for it. We have only to go on straight forward in the way of obedience and holiness, and we need not fear that we shall fail.

Some of us, I hope, have made some new step, during the past Lent, towards a holy life; some of us, I hope, have felt that God was putting into their minds good desires to do His will more perfectly—have felt the wish to be better; and have resolved in their minds that they would leave off something which their conscience witnessed against, and would begin to do some duty which they had before put off. They have made a step forward, and God has

helped them hitherto. And if they will trust themselves to God, He will help them further, He will help them to the end. Only go on, my brethren; fear not, and be not discouraged, for the Risen Saviour is on your side, the Risen Saviour is approving of what you have done to draw nearer to Him. His special grace has put these good desires into your hearts, has made you feel sorry for sin, has made you long earnestly to be more holy, has wrought in you a greater hunger and thirst after righteousness, a stronger and deeper wish to be, in truth, what you profess to be, to be more like that Holy One who has called you to be His.

Do not be afraid that He will forget you or leave you. Only pray that His continual help may bring your good desires to good effect. Fear not—He is risen, and the gate is opened to you of everlasting life. He is risen, and none can snatch His own out of His hand. He is risen, and He sees and marks that you are striving to rise too. Be of good courage. Day by day you shall find that your steps are not in vain; you shall find that you can do what you once thought impossible. You shall find that that way of serving God with a perfect heart, which seemed so difficult, becomes not only easy, but the very joy of your heart. In the darkness you shall see light; on the waters which were going to swallow you up, you shall walk safely. Through the fires which swept and roared around you on every side, you shall pass, and not a hair of your head be singed. When you meet death—dark and terrible as death is—you shall find that they who through Christ *will* conquer *can* conquer. "Hast

thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? . . . He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

May this new life and this new hope be ours! Life draws on, and we are coming nearer and nearer to death. Easter reminds us of life, but it also reminds us of that death, through which we must pass, before we can have that life. It is certain that we are going on to death; is it equally certain, is it reasonably likely, that we are going on to that life of the Resurrection of the dead? What a day of awful remembrances as well as of joyful ones! Our grave is prepared for us, as surely as was Christ's. Lie in that grave we must, as surely as He lay in His. And if we cannot hope to rise out of it as He rose, what will become of us? Now Christ offers the joy of His Resurrection; now He offers to raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Now He offers the new heart, and the wedding garment. To some of us it may be the eleventh hour, yet He offers it still; He calls us still. He sends this great holiday to remind us

of what He has done, and that He is indeed in earnest. This Easter call neglected, may be our last. This Easter call attended to, may be our thought of comfort when we are dying, may be the opening to us of the gate of death, that we may pass to a joyful Resurrection—to the sight and presence of the Blessed One, who died for us, and rose again, to open to men His kingdom in heaven.

XVII

CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

"For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."—ROMANS vi. 10, 11.

WHEN St. Paul thought of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the first thought that arose in his mind was one of praise and thankfulness for that amazing victory over death and sin. But a second thought followed hard after it. That was, how the Resurrection of their Saviour ought to raise up His disciples to a better and holier life; how it ought to draw them away from the sins that they followed, before they heard of their great deliverance; how it ought to make them feel that sin had been condemned in the Cross and Sacrifice of the only-begotten Son, that its power had been broken, and that it had been shown to be vanquished and made shameful—a thing to be loathed and shrunk from with horror—by His glorious Resurrection. *They* were to rise to holiness, for Christ, by rising from the death of shame, which is the punishment of sin, and the horror of the grave, had put a great gulf between sin and all those whom He has redeemed. *They* were

to go on henceforth in newness of life, for Christ, by rising from the dead, had opened to them a new life in His heaven, where nothing that defileth, nothing unholy, can enter. Being "dead to sin," by the death of Christ, he says, "How shall we . . . live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

That is the great lesson of Easter to us still,—"Newness of life." That is the great thought which, year by year, it brings before us, enforced and strengthened by all that is wonderful in the counsels of God, or amazing in His power, or winning and overpowering in the greatness of His love: continual improvement in all goodness, for the love of Jesus Christ, and in His strength. And thankful indeed may we be, that this, the great business of all our life, is thus forced on our minds continually by the coming back of this great day. We get slack in it. We get tired of it. Our hearts become dull and insensible as the common days of our life pass over us, and bring with them the engagements and interests of this world. But now we are forced, as it were, to let different thoughts into our minds—thoughts very different from those of the world—thoughts of Christ's sufferings and death, of His burial and rising again. They come into our minds, almost whether we will or no, and compel us to remember how we were redeemed, what was the price of our souls, and who was the Victim, who the Conqueror, in our cause.

No one can quite resist this. No one, whether he obeys the call or not, can help feeling that, in the solemn remembrance of what our Lord suffered and did for us, there is a call, a loud and earnest call, to try to serve God better.

Now that we have been hearing of Christ rising again, now that our ears are full of the words and sounds of rejoicing, which mark the coming back of this great anniversary of our Saviour's victory, let us open our hearts to that for which Christ rose again, to that which His rising again was to point out as henceforth to be our path of life, and was to give us strength to follow—continual improvement in goodness, continual victory over sin, in remembrance of our Risen Saviour, in the power of His grace and help. This is to be our aim and object. Christ rose again that we might be like Himself. Christ cast sin behind Him, and trampled upon death, that we, His redeemed, might be parted from that corruption, that love of what is foul and earthly and wicked, and be joined to Him in spirit, and in the love of all that is good and true and holy. Christ rose again to show us that henceforth we need not serve sin; that henceforth if we do serve sin, it is all our own fault; for that He is as able and willing to make us rise victorious over sin here, as He is to make us victorious over death hereafter.

Shall we not listen to His call? I know, my brethren, that you wish in your secret hearts to be better than you are. I know that you have moments of religious thought, of fear, of distress for your sins and carelessness; moments—they may be only moments—when you feel the value of your souls,

and the greatness of eternity, and the awfulness of death, and the love of God, and the beauty of the words which Jesus Christ spoke to us sinners. I know that there are very few, even of the most careless, who have not sometimes such thoughts as these. Much more those to whom religion is an accustomed and familiar thought. We are all of us wishing that we were better and holier, that our sins had less power of enticing us, and breaking down our good purposes. We are all wishing it; and now Christ is setting before us His mighty Resurrection, that we may no longer merely wish, but, in His strength, and for the sake of His love, that we may arise and try to be better; that for His sake, and in His name, we may shake off our sloth, our backwardness, our self-complacency, our secret love of sin, and go forward in that pathway of the just, which is not merely light now and then, but which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Continual improvement in all goodness, continual amendment of life, in the name of Christ, for the love of Christ, in the strength of Christ—that is what the followers of the Risen Saviour are called to; so only are they rising with Him, so only are they worthy of their calling. There is no sitting still, no being satisfied with that to which we have attained in the great work of continual sanctification. "Not as though I had already attained," says St. Paul, "either were already perfect. . . . Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended" —or attained, "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward

the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." There is no other way but this of running the race that is set before us, there is no other way but this of striving for the conqueror's crown. They do not win the race who go half-way, and then sit down satisfied. They do not gain the battle who fight for half the day, and half conquer the enemy, and then give over. *Forwards* is the only word in every race, in every battle, in every struggle. Stop, and you are beaten. Stop, and you have thrown away your chance. Stop, and you will not stop, for you will be forced to go back. Stop, and you will lose all the hope and pleasure of the great work you are engaged in. The only way to keep our souls from flagging is not to stop, but to press on; not to be satisfied with what we have attained, but to reach forward for more; not to look back on what is behind, but to rouse ourselves, and strive after what has yet to be done. Remember we are the followers and soldiers of a Conqueror. It will not do to serve such a Captain with flagging spirits and faint hearts. If you would rejoice as He rejoices, you must have His great heart and fearless spirit of victory. If you would not be left behind, you must keep up with the march of His bold war upon sin. He went through with His work to the uttermost, He shrank back from no suffering, and turned aside from no difficulty, He was wearied by no length of time, and left no enemy unsubdued. If you would be with Him, you must do as He did. You must fight the fight of faith till He sends you your time of rest. You must rise higher and higher every day in your victory over the sin that besets

you, till He calls you to follow Him through the grave and gate of death to the Resurrection of life.

And the improvement in goodness is no thing of words or feelings. Do not ask yourselves much about it. Ask yourselves rather, if you are a servant, whether you do what God has given you to do for your master in a more cheerful and ready spirit; whether you complain less than you used to do; whether you are less ready to answer and justify yourself; whether you can bear rebuke and blame more patiently. Ask yourself whether you do your work not so much for the eye of the master, as for the eye of God, who sees in secret; whether you try more to bear the disagreeables of your lot, the tempers, the provocations of your fellow-servants; whether you are faithful to the uttermost of your power. If you are masters, ask yourselves whether you feel more that your servants are your brethren in Jesus Christ; that you owe them a heavier debt of kindness and example, than they owe you of service and obedience; that God has set them to serve you, and has set you to take care and thought for their good and their happiness. Ask yourselves whether you too are better able to bridle your tongue, and to bear provocation. That is the sort of continual improvement which must go on in us, and to which Easter calls us with a special awakening; the improvement of heart, and soul, and temper, and thoughts shown in the work and duties of every day —purity, holiness, lovingness, trust in God, resignation, conquest over self — growing continually— growing upwards freely and cheerfully and happily towards Jesus Christ on high.

This is an improvement which nothing but the love of Jesus Christ can keep up in us, nothing but His strength can enable us to persevere in. We may do our duties well and carefully. We may be excellent servants, excellent masters, good neighbours, useful friends. Yet there is all the difference in the world, whether our heart is in what we do, or whether we do it because we are too proud to disgrace ourselves by doing wrong, too proud to let ourselves be found fault with. If we would serve Christ with a glad heart, wishing to serve Him better, we must serve Him with the wish to please Him; with the wish to show Him how much we love Him; with the wish that He should deign to love us, unworthy as we are, more and more. It is only for the love of Christ that we can keep up that long battle against our sins and temptations. It is only for the love of Christ that we can really go on struggling to overcome our pleasant bosom sins, the companions of our life, to which we have got so accustomed for many years. It is only for the love of Christ, and with Christ's strength helping us, that we can really make way in following the path—a hard one sometimes, though still a happy and blessed one—by which Christ Himself went on to glory. It is only for the love of Christ and in His name, that we can resist the weariness, the disappointments, the failures which we must expect to meet with in trying to do better; in trying to fulfil the commandment of love which He left us. It is only the love of Christ which can make head against the love of the world, the love of self, the strength of offended pride, the provocations of unkindness and wrong. It is only

the love of Christ that can teach us to forgive and to forbear, and that can make us wish to be really in heart and spirit like Him in His goodness, His patience, His meekness, in His self-denial, in His readiness to do the will of God.

Therefore, look on Jesus Christ dying for you, living for you, till you begin to feel something of that wonderful scene. Consider Him, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, till you are stirred by the greatness of His love towards you. Contemplate His glory, look at the prize He sets before you, even to be with Him in His Resurrection, in His glory, till your hearts begin to burn at the high and noble calling to which you are called. Surely not a calling, this, that suits with sin. Surely not a crown, this, that belongs to the laggard and the doubter. Surely this is not a reward which those who are too careless, and too well satisfied with themselves to run the race, can hope to receive. Christ has conquered sin, and what can those who are Christ's have to do with it any longer? Christ has gone up to give us strength, to give us help, to hold our hands; and shall we shrink from trying to follow Him? Christ has suffered, and burst the bands of death for us, and shall we, whom He has set free, let the bands of sin, which are in the end the bands of death, hold us down and entangle us, and keep us from moving onward with that glorious army, which is pressing forward to tread in the steps of their great Captain and Saviour? Shall we not to-day rise from our slumber and our sluggishness? Shall we not awake at that cry which might rouse the dead, "Christ is risen," and see to ourselves what we are wanting in?

Shall we not to-day make a new beginning in His name, and for His love; and not be satisfied with what we have attained to, but honestly find out in what things we might be better, and pray that we may increase in them more and more every day till we die? "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." So shall that blessing be yours. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are Thy ways. Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water. They will go from strength to strength; and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion."

XVIII

PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."—ST. JAMES ii. 26.

THIS is one of the many texts in which the Spirit of God, in the Bible, warns us against a profession of religion without practice. Ever since religion was in the world it was necessary to give this warning. Ever since religion was in the world, men have tried, in one way or another, to seem to be religious without really being so. In the strivings of the Holy Spirit with men's rebellious hearts, here has been the last and greatest battle. It was comparatively easy to get them to receive the truth; it was easy to get them to acknowledge the Lord for their God, and to get them to see that God's law is a perfect law, and His Gospel full of grace and love; the difficulty was, after they had confessed all this, to get them to act accordingly. The history of the Bible shows us that it was always so. When Israel came out of Egypt, and received the law from Mount Sinai, and saw the mighty deliverances and the strange wonders of the Lord's right hand—the passage of the Red Sea, and the water from the rock, and the manna from heaven—they called themselves the people of God; but

though they made this profession, and had the miracles before their eyes, they still tempted God in their hearts, and would not walk in His laws. None so strict in keeping the law as the Pharisees; nothing seemed too hard for them to do in the way of religious service; nothing seemed able to shake their faith in the Scriptures and promises of God; if ever there was a faith it was theirs, and yet if ever there was a dead faith it was theirs too; a faith without goodness, without any true obedience and service of the heart. And this was no fault peculiar to Jews or to the heathen. The fault is in the heart and nature of man. It was as necessary as ever, after the Gospel was preached, to tell man that it was quite possible—alas! and very easy—to receive even the Gospel just in the same way as the Pharisees had received the law of Moses; to be a believer in name, in appearance, in words, in forms, and yet to have nothing answering to all this in our thoughts and way of life; to be, indeed, in all that we most wish for and do, exactly the opposite of that which we profess to be, as disciples of Christ, making our boast of His salvation, and of the light of His blessed Gospel.

Even in St. James's days, so soon after Christ's Resurrection, so soon after the giving of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, while the Apostles were still in the world to bear witness to Jesus Christ, and to teach what they had learned from Him, and seen in Him, men began to profess religion without practising it. St. James saw Christians about him whose faith was an empty show. It was like a body from which the spirit had departed, a body which seemed the same as the shape and countenance of a living

man; but though the eye was there, it saw not; though hand and foot were there, they were as powerless and motionless as stone or wood, for the heart had ceased to beat, and there was no spirit in it. Such is a faith which works not—a profession without practice, a tree without fruit. And such faith, dead and vain, doing nothing, feeling nothing, gaining no blessing, inheriting no promise, calling down no comfort, hoping for no reward, grew up even under the eyes of the Apostles, and called for earnest warnings from them. Such, alas! we may be quite sure will prevail in every age of the Church, and will be a greater hindrance to the work of redemption than even open sin and the darkest ignorance, till Christ comes back again to reveal all secrets, and draw the veil from all hearts. Oh, how anxious should we be lest it be found among us; what searchings of heart ought there to be, to see that we are not walking all our days in that vain show, entangled in the deceit of our own hearts, having a name which seems alive—yet dead in our inward soul and spirit, dead at the core and root—having a form of godliness and yet denying the power thereof.

What a strange thing that it should be so! What a strange thing that a character and way of acting, which in matters merely of this world is exactly the one which men most despise and detest, should be just that one which, in matters of the world to come, such numbers fall into without ever seeing the harm of it! For what kind of character in matters of this world do we more speak against, than a man of words without deeds? "A man full of words shall not prosper upon the earth." What reproach is worse

than that of being full of promises and never keeping them? What harder thing can be said of a man than that he speaks you fair, but means nothing by his speeches; that while he is professing to care for you, and to wish to do you service, he is only thinking of serving himself? Whom do we see through so soon, whom does even the dullest think he can see through and despise, but the man of smooth tongue and good face, whose real doings are all the other way? What is a man generally most anxious to clear himself from but the suspicion of not being straightforward and sincere in his words to others, of wishing to put them off with the show of goodwill and heartiness, of saying one thing and thinking another, of offering one thing and meaning another? There is nothing in our common dealings in life that we look on with so much dislike, and condemn so severely, as profession without practice; no one whom we should less like to have as a friend and companion, than a man who was all talk, and who never had the honesty of heart to act as he talked; nothing that would be a greater disgrace and insult to the humblest of us, than to be told that he pretended to be one thing to one person, and another to another.

And now, think, how often what we would not for all the world be to our fellow-creatures, we are to God. Think how that which is the greatest reproach to a man among men, we do not care about, we let every one see in us, without the least minding it, towards God. Think how little words and deeds, profession and practice, go together. Think how often there is ever so wide a space between them, in

the real inward religion even of the serious and careful, a difference between words and deeds which, in matters of this world, would be thought a heavy reproach. Think how the religion of numbers is nothing else but this very thing ;—words, without any deeds answering to them, the name and title of a Christian, without anything of a Christian's thoughts, or feelings, or wishes, or works ; fair words and smooth speeches to God, and a way of life just the reverse, which dishonours Him and provokes Him, which flatters Him with the lips in Church, and despises all He says as soon as the back is turned upon Him, which treats God exactly as the double-faced man treats his neighbour with his soft tongue and his inward malice and deceit, having indeed a faith, but a faith out of which all the spirit has gone, and left it dead.

I do not mean that all who so treat their God and Saviour mean to be hypocrites. They do not most of them. They do not see how they are acting. They do not see that, in reality, they are serving God as they would be ashamed to serve their fellow-creatures ; as they would certainly be full of anger and complaint, just anger and complaint, if they were treated so by their fellow-creatures. They do it without seeing it, because "the heart of man is deceitful above all things," and is able to deceive itself in the face of the clearest light and certainty. They do it, and go on doing it through life, professing the Gospel and not practising it, because they *will* shut their eyes to what they do. When they are asked to stop and think about their ways, they will not stop and think ; when they are reminded of

their faults, they will go on thinking that they cannot have these faults; when they are warned of the sins which other men have fallen into, and which the Bible tells us of, they will think that they are different, and that these examples are nothing to them; when they are told of their danger, they turn towards other thoughts and business, and persuade themselves that, somehow or other, things will come right with them at last. No, they do not mean to be hypocrites, but yet they do what hypocrites do. And they come at last to think that this way of professing without practising, of saying without doing, of seeming to be without being, is, in their service of God, the most natural and most harmless and most reasonable thing in the world.

To see in the matter how we are self-condemned, take some cases of the way in which we act to man and to God, and compare them. What should we say of a man who, while he was asking pardon of his master, or his friend, or his father, for a great fault, was all the while laughing and making a joke of it; or even while pretending to be sorry, and speaking the words of sorrow, was in reality thinking of other things; or who, while speaking the words of sorrow, did not really care whether he was forgiven or not. I think you would, most of you, say that such a man was acting a most disgusting part; I am sure that, if any of you were the person whose pardon was asked, you would be much more inclined to think that the offender had made matters much worse by asking pardon in such a way. And now let us ask ourselves, what is our common way of asking pardon of God for our sins, either privately

at home or with the congregation at Church? Make every fair allowance for wanderings of mind, and the difficulty of keeping our thoughts on that which we cannot see with our eyes—some wandering, some inattention, there will be at times, in the prayers of very sincere and earnest people; but then they are always striving against it, are always humbled by it, are always confessing it as part of their load of sin and infirmity. But is this all the inattention that Christians are guilty of in confessing their sins to God? Or are there not many who, when the prayers for pardon of sins are said, never think of their sins at all, who from Sunday to Sunday hear the beautiful and touching words of the Prayer Book—confessing that we have all erred and strayed like lost sheep, and praying God to have mercy upon us miserable offenders, to spare those which confess their faults, to restore those that are penitent—and who, Sunday after Sunday, never think of the words, never feel sorrow for their sins, never remember what sins they have to ask pardon for, never care whether they are spared, or restored, or forgiven at all? They bow their heads because every one does the same; but they bow them down to think of anything but their sins, of which the words of the prayers are speaking. They seem to join in asking forgiveness of our Father in heaven, but I fear their conscience must tell them, and their careless behaviour sometimes shows it, that it has been but a matter of outward show. Can we think that God will be satisfied with *such* confessions of our faults and think them worth listening to, which, if we were asking pardon of man, would be thought mockery and insult?

And how do we praise and thank God? When we utter the words of praise, do our hearts go with them, or are they anything but cold and dead words said because it is expected of us to say them? When we thank God for His countless benefits, are we really thankful, or do we only make as though we were, and go through the right and proper show of being so? Further, when we have said good words to God with our mouth, as Christians are bound to do, what kind of feeling do we show to Him, to His commands, to His holy will and wish at other times? Are our praises and thanksgivings in Church a true proof and mark of how much we wish to do in order to please Him at other times? If they are not, if we who praise and bless His Name with our mouth here, go and do contrary to all His laws in our houses, if we scorn His words, rebel against His authority, despise His threatenings, and live the life of the scoffer and the worldly for the rest of the week, are we not doing that hateful thing, flattering with our lips, and dissembling with our tongue? And what should we think of this, if it was *man*—if it was ourselves—to whom this was done instead of God? What do we think of the man who flatters with his lips when it is *man* whom he flatters? What do we think of a man who praises us to the utmost to our faces, and then goes and says all kinds of evil of us behind our backs? What do we think of the man to whom we have done good, who comes pouring out floods of thanks to us with his lips, and then, after all our benefits to him, and all his professions of being so deeply grateful for them, does all that he can to vex, and

distress, and hurt us? And now compare what we think and feel when these things are done to man, and when they are done to God. Will not God, indeed, at the last day, make us our own judges, and force us to condemn ourselves out of our own mouths, for having one measure for ourselves and another measure for Him?

Oh that the clear and just sense that we have of double-dealing, of saying without doing, of acting a part in matters of this world, would lead us to think seriously what a shocking thing it is when we have faith without works to God—when we bear a Christian name, and do the outward deeds of a Christian, without that heart and spirit of truth, and of real earnestness, without which every work and word of man is dead, and rotten, and accursed! Christ did not give us words without deeds. Christ has not professed to love us, and left that a profession of the lips. He spoke not without meaning what He said, He promised nothing that He did not perform. What He did perform,—*how*, indeed, He loved us—Easter is too near for you to have forgotten. Oh let us not make ourselves, in serving that blessed Master, equal with those we most despise, those who are all talk, all fair outside, all smooth-tongued falsehood, all hollowness and deceit. We can none of us, indeed, act fully up to what we profess with our lips; we should be saints else. But we can *try* to act up to it; we can help that shameful reproach of professing without even trying. We know our danger. We know that we are ever ready to turn our faith into a matter of words and show, and to give our hearts to other

things. God has warned us, and over and over again have His words been repeated. Every time that we hear them without attending, makes this very danger greater. Pray Him to help you to be what you profess, to practise what you believe. Remember that you serve One who sees at the moment the exact wish and meaning of your secret soul, with whom all things are real. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Pray to Him that He will keep you from deceiving yourselves with "shadows of religion." Pray that He will give you grace to remember whom you serve—One with whom there is nothing but what is thoroughly real in word and deed; no mere show, nothing that only *seems*, but One, with whom all is serious, all is in earnest. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, He is not the God of the false, but of the true. Remember the words, which are so certain, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth" —and again—"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

XIX

WASTING AWAY OF LIFE

"For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—2 CORINTHIANS iv. 18.

I DO not know which is most wonderful the way in which we are perpetually being reminded that this world passeth away; or the way in which, in spite of these many reminders, we most of us practically cannot bring ourselves to believe it, and cannot, even by wishing, feel that it is so. "The things which are seen are temporal,"—only for a time. "The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof," the desires of it. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." So says the Bible, in words that for their force and beauty impress themselves on our minds so that we can never forget them. But we do not need the Bible to teach us this truth; the witness of it comes back to us without ceasing. Nothing can stop, nothing can drive away, nothing can alter the testimony, that time, and nature, and the world are ever impressing on us, of their own passing away—of their rapid passing away for ever. Scarcely has one reminder bidden us take warning, when another comes with the same solemn tale: the

world passeth away, is passing away now. Here we are past Easter, and it seems only the other day that an old year passed away, and a new one began. Another Christmas comes when it seems but a little while since we were saying what a beautiful summer we were having. And long as it now seems before winter will come again, we know from experience that the time will not be long in passing. How all the divisions of our time, and changes from one thing to another, whether we make them ourselves or they are made for us, put us in mind how everything is slipping away from under us. And when we feel the truth of their message, when for a moment, as it were, the clouds roll away, and we look down the bottomlèss gulf of eternity, we see that we are sweeping towards it, with no more power to stop, no, not for a single instant, than if we were falling down from a great height, or were being carried along on a swift and irresistible stream. And there is no want of things to force the same warning on us. Cast your eyes where you will, and think. Look round at the walls and stones of this Church where we are worshipping—Where are they who built the walls? Where are they, the marks of whose tools are still to be seen on the stones? Where are all they who have come here, as we come now, to worship? Look at the trees that meet your eye as you go out. They are beginning to put on their leaves once more, and look fresh and green. Who planted them? Who were young when they began to grow? Look at the walls of your own houses. Who built them; or who remembers their building? The Church, the houses, the trees, remain—the lifeless things remain, but

the living men—the brain that thought, the tongue that spoke, the hand that wrought, and the heart that rejoiced or sorrowed—all are gone, as if they had never been. The world passeth away quickly indeed, but we ourselves, we pass even more quickly than the world. Whether we look forward or look backward—hope or regret, joy or sorrow,—we have the same reminder brought home to us. All tells the same story: "the things which are seen are temporal." We are reminded of it daily. And yet, who regards it? Who believes it, except for a season—for the moment when it flashes across his mind, or for the short while when the evidences of it are so striking and solemn that it cannot be shut out, or its impressions withstood? The impression passes off, and then we fall back into our common way of feeling, that time and the world, and our interest in it, are, practically speaking, unlimited. Surely this is a wonderful thing—a wonderful thing that, with weeks and years ending as they do, we cannot get ourselves to realise that they must, one day, end for good for us. We think of the people we have known—how they have changed, have grown old, have passed away—yet we seem to feel as if *we* were never to grow old. We cannot realise that we are, in very deed, passing and slipping away, like everything else round us: we cannot realise how frail and uncertain our condition is: we cannot feel the necessity of numbering our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

But ought we not to ask ourselves very seriously, what we do to keep ourselves from forgetting a truth which it is so easy to forget. We may say that it

is necessary to be busy in the place or work to which God has called us, but still the fact remains that all this must come to an end some day—that however important or praiseworthy our work may be, it is but for a few years more, and then all our concern in it will be over. And then what remains? It is well to work while it is day, but can it be well to forget that the night also cometh when no man can work? Can it be well or wise or manly—I say nothing now of higher reasons—to refuse, in the midst of our strength and our busy life, to face the fact, the only certain thing that we can know of what is to happen to us—that we shall die? Is it wise to go on living in a perishing and vanishing world, as if we had the privilege of possessing it without stint, when we know the truth to be, that we and all that we have in it, are passing on to our last hour here, as swiftly and surely as the sun which has risen in the morning is hastening to his setting in the evening?

Yes, we must work, and our work must doubtless take up much of our thoughts. But let not our work deceive us; or rather, let not the Evil one use our work, our honest work which God has set us, to deceive and ensnare us. In spite of all the hard and wonderful work done in the world, this world which we see is in truth but a shadow. It is the unseen in it which is the truth, which does not pass away. It is the unseen God, who rules and orders it now, and is preparing all things for His own blessed purposes in the eternity which is coming. It is the Saviour out of sight, who is calling sinners to come to Him, with whom is that blood of sprinkling which

alone can make us clean ; who rules in that kingdom of angels and redeemed men, of the spirits of the just and sanctified made glorious for ever, whither He invites us all to follow His victory, and through death to live and reign with Him. It is the unseen Spirit, the author of grace, and source of love, and giver of life and peace—He only in whom we can seek strength and cleansing—He only who can work effectually in changing and renewing our hearts and creating in us sinners a new spirit,—it is He only who, though unseen, can minister true comfort in sorrow, can give true light in darkness, true hope in desolation, and true help in weakness. All this belongs to the unseen. The world knows not of it. The world passes on in its course as if all this power and grace and love were not. Time rolls on and shows nothing of it to the eye of man. And yet to man they belong. They are his heritage if he will have them, and they are an everlasting heritage. They are not touched by the passing away of things temporal ; and though man must pass away in his bodily existence, they are within his reach. Not things temporal, not things that perish in the using, not the spring and summer that fade, not the days and hours that pass over his head like fleeting clouds—not these are his portion. His portion is a world that never passes away, a blessedness that never changes or comes to an end, an everlasting life, which knows no death because it can know no sin.

Are these things true? It is true, too true, as many of us feel to our cost, in our broken hearts and our wrecked happiness on this side of the grave,

that things seen are but temporal—are but for a time. But is it true that there are unseen things not far from any of us, not out of the reach of any of us, which are eternal? Are they real? Are they more than a wish, a dream, a doubtful hope? There are those who say so, but not you, my brethren. However little you think about these things, and let them influence your lives, you know better than to doubt the blessed truth. You acknowledge an unseen God and Father who watches over men. You acknowledge a Saviour who died and rose again, and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for all who believe in Him. Why then should you fear to face the thought—solemn, awful, chilling as it is to flesh and blood—that all these things that we see, and we ourselves among them, have an end—an end that cannot be far off? Why should we shrink and turn away our thoughts when something reminds us how fast our own days are going? Why should we wish to keep up the delusion that we, at least, may hope to enjoy a continuing city here? Why should we try to disguise from ourselves the certainty, that as our fathers have disappeared so must we disappear? We know that it is through the grave and gate of death alone that we can pass to the sight of that world above which has no end. We know that if we are hurrying on to death, that if what we value most is perishing, yet that this is but what must go before we can enter into our rest. Things earthly must pass away before things heavenly can appear. Time must run out before eternity can begin. The ties of this life must be broken before they can be joined together anew,

never more to be parted. This perishable life must give way before that glorious life of spirits can be manifested in us. Why then, when we have such promises, such prospects, to make up for what we part with here, should we be so loath to give it up? Why should we sorrow that our years pass so quickly, that so few remain? Why should we fear to die?

The Bible has told us the real reason. "The sting of death is sin." The sting of death—that which gives it its real bitterness—that which is worse than the pain, and the darkness, and the ceasing to be—is that sad secret which each man carries in his heart—the secret of his own sin. Whether it be the secret of present sin, the secret that he loves the world more than he ought to do, or the secret of some sin done long ago, and impossible to be undone—the fear that he is going into the unseen world unforgiven, unprepared, unpurified—that is the real sting of death. We can hide our sins for a while from our conscience, we can blind ourselves to their enormity, and make ourselves forget them. But sin will sting, even though hidden, when death, or the thought of death, wakens it into reality. It is the consciousness of sin which shuts out that prospect of things unseen, which was meant to console us for the passing away of things seen and temporal. It is the consciousness of sin which makes us cling to our place of trial, and makes us shrink from parting from that where there is still place left to the sinner for repentance.

We know that we are fast passing away. Shall it be a miserable thought to us, or one—awful indeed

—yet lightened with consolation and hope from beyond the grave? For you know very well that there is One who has taken the sting from death. There is One who has risen from the dead, One who has overcome sin, and has given to His servants the strength to repent of it, and to overcome it too. There is One who can breathe His blessing and His love and power over what seems to man the saddest death. You may come to Him if you will. You cannot fly from dying—you cannot put it off by not thinking about it. But you may so prepare that, when it comes, it will not be so dreadful to look at as it seems perhaps now. If you come while you may, to the great Conqueror of sin and death, you will find in Him One who has held up many and will hold you up. Wonderful indeed is it how He has taught His servants to die—to look death in the face for months and years, through days of weakness and nights of trouble, and to look at him with calm and patient waiting. Yet so it has been. Through a discipline of pain and feebleness they have learnt the heavenly lesson, that to one who has in earnest taken Christ for his Saviour and his trust, to die is indeed gain. To them the loss was temporal, the reward eternal. The being cut off from earthly work and pleasure, the giving up of such happiness as they saw vouchsafed to their friends—this was but a thing temporal; the purified trust, the heart unloosed from earthly bonds, the deeper love of God, as in their trial they daily learned to love Him more—these are things eternal. Blessed are they who may have had to wait through years of trial if they have at last thus

learned the value of earth and heaven. And blessed are they who have had the opportunity of watching such a trial, if only they have known how to watch it, if they have let the lesson sink into their hearts. Who would not endure to see his dearest friend suffering long, if he saw him also learning more the mind of Christ, and becoming more and more meet for heaven? Who would not give thanks, though with tears and a broken heart, for a dispensation of sorrow which was leading on so graciously to a dispensation of endless mercy?

May our heavenly Guide and Teacher open our hearts to take in and feel the truths which, in such abundance, He sets before us. May He show us where only the heart of man can find peace and comfort and rest. May He make us sober while it is our turn for joy; and may He strengthen and cheer us when it is our time to be mourners. And whether through joy or sorrow, may He so lead us through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal.

XX

HEAVEN AND PURITY

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour."—PSALM xxiv. 3, 4.

TO-DAY our thoughts are of heaven and of our Master there. He is gone up on high, into the hill of the Lord. He is for ever in His holy place. Our minds follow Him no longer on the earth, but as received within the everlasting doors, the King and Lord of all the glory that is within them. And while we hear and think of these things, we feel in a manner lifted up too above earthly and mortal things. Dull indeed must be the heart which has the power of understanding at all, and does not feel more than ordinarily stirred within itself at the high and pure aspects which this time brings back to us of our redemption and our calling. For now, in the person of our Redeemer, we see the struggle at length ended and the warfare accomplished. We see in His example how earth leads up to and finishes in heaven; how the end of suffering, and trial, and death, is the leaving behind all pain and sin, for the new life of glory in the kingdom

of God. We see how the body of man's humiliation drops at last its veil of corruption, to be exalted above the clouds and above the stars, to the holy place of God. We read of our Master ascending up on high, and feel for a moment that earth is after all of kin with heaven. We feel that heaven is meant to come after earth—as the morning follows the night—and is one day to take its place; that earth was made to be changed and transfigured into heaven, that man was made to finish his course in his Master's endless rest, in the immortality of another world. Who can help, who can resist, thoughts such as these being borne in upon his soul when the Ascension of our Lord is specially before us? Who can help feeling carried somewhat above the earth, at the idea of the glory and bliss and unfading beauty of that heaven where Christ dwells with the angels and the redeemed? Who can but feel for the time, that born of earth as he is, there is yet an attraction drawing him to a higher and nobler country—who but is moved by the longing to be safe within it—who but feels with joy that he also has been made an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and is meant by his Father to be where Christ is gone? Our hearts indeed are dull and blind, entangled with earthly cares and chained down by earthly feelings; but if there is a part of our Lord's history which more than another softens and exalts them above themselves, to purer thoughts above this visible world, it is when we read how He was parted from His disciples and received up in the clouds of the sky. If there is a time at which the calm and peace and hope of heaven seem

specially to come down into our souls, it is when we keep the memory of His Ascension.

But who are they who are really to follow Him? He is gone, and it is only in the secret of our hearts that we know where He is. It is good to think of where He is, till our hearts catch the flame; and, meditating much on our Master's glory, we burn to be with Him. But how shall it be so? Who of those, whose souls rise to heaven in hymns and prayers that speak of His triumphant going up—who of those, to whose spirit, as they read or listen, there is opened the vision of a heaven which one day may be their own—who, of all those, shall pass beyond to that distant glory? Who are they who shall follow the ascended Master? Who shall ascend with Him into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place? Who are they who shall join the triumph? Who are they who shall share His rest?

Can we doubt? Can we imagine any but one answer to the question? Can we suppose any but one sort of followers of such a leader? Can we think of any mounting to where He is, but those who have walked the path that He walked in—but those who, seeing what He was, have become like Him? "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up in His holy place?" Can it be that the proud and the selfish, the unloving and the impure, the bitter in heart and tongue, the soul steeped in vanity and fixed on the earth, can be of that ascending company? We know it cannot be. The holy place cannot be for the unholy. Our own hearts, in the midst of their confusion and self-

deceits, even while trying to be blind to the truth, in spite of themselves witness and warn us, who is the man for whom Christ is gone to prepare a place in heaven. "Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek Him; even of them that seek thy face, O Jacob."

Who that has ever heard these words, but has seemed to hear in them an answer from heaven, has felt that in them indeed was the very Voice of God? Amid all the darkness and uncertainty of the world, here at least was a gleam of light without a shadow, of truth without a doubt. In all the questions and difficulties of life, here was a foundation which no storm could shake; here, at least, our feet touched firm ground. The pure in heart, and the clean in hand—these are they who are in the train of Christ. These are they for whom heaven is preparing. These are they to whom their Master's going up to heaven, is a figure and type, as well as a pledge of their own wondrous destiny; who, in His triumph see their own; who, in the fulfilment of His glorification, see the exaltation of their own redeemed and new-born nature, in which corruption shall put on incorruption, and earthly life, with its suffering, and sin, and decay, shall blossom forth into perfectness, and holiness, and joy immortal.

And yet, how many of us can read these words, ringing with the very certainty of truth, without misgiving and sadness, and without fear? "Who shall

ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour." Who among us are the clean of hand and the pure of heart? Who can feel that these words are for him—that they truly describe what he knows himself to be? Yet they are the truth. And they whose conscience tells them dark stories about the cleanness of their hands, and the pureness of their hearts—about the uncharitable deeds that, with professions of kindness on their lips, they have been guilty of to their brethren—may well have many an anxious searching of heart before such an answer from the justice of God, who never changes, never mistakes, never speaks in vain. They seem to put a gulf which none can pass, between us and that hope of ascending to where Christ is gone before, and finishing our course in life, by being with Him where He is. And so it would be, but for those two great truths, which bridge over the gulf between us and hope; the truth that Christ has died for sinners, and the truth that sinners may repent and change. Pure in heart, and clean in hand, we must be before we can follow Christ to His holy hill, and rise up in His place of blessedness. Never doubt, never waver or question about that, if you value your salvation. Yet faint not, despond not, when you feel that your hands have been unclean, your heart impure. You know that there is not only grace to forgive, but grace to change. You know that not only has love taken on itself the sins of the world, but that it has opened a way into the hearts of men, to turn them from darkness to

light, and to raise them from the death of their sins unto the life of righteousness. You have heard of sins, which though they "be as scarlet," shall be made "as white as snow; though they be red like crimson . . . shall be as wool." You have heard of a Saviour, who can not only wash you throughly from your transgression, and cleanse you from your sin, but can also create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you. Dark and sad the past may be. We cannot wipe it out from our memory and life. But One, who can do what to man is impossible, can hide and forgive it. And if we cannot go backwards and change what has been, we can go forwards and change what is. Human hearts—blessed be God! are not unchangeable; they may be corrected and strengthened. Our sins do not cleave to us so fast that the grace which comes with prayer and faith, and earnest striving, cannot tear them from us. There is a Deliverer who knows the fierce trials and battles which go on in our hearts, and who can break the chain and set free the captive. The bowed and crushed spirit may be raised and healed. The bitter temper may be sweetened; the revengeful one may be overcome, and the sullen and spiteful one may be softened. Christ is doing this His work of converting and sanctifying every day around us, as He has been doing it ever since He came. And what He has done, and is doing to others, He may do to us. As He is leading others step by step to the blessings of the pure in heart and the clean in hand, so He may, as He is most willing, lead us. The feeling of our present sin and our unfitness for heaven, must indeed be a thought to sober us, and sometimes almost to

overwhelm us—"O Lord, who may abide it?" But "There is mercy with Thee, therefore shalt Thou be feared." There is mercy for the repentant and the sincere—mercy for the broken and contrite heart—mercy for the soul that knows its own evil, and seeks God's help to turn from it to better things. Not only those who by God's grace have kept themselves pure and true, who have been all along, as far as human sin and weakness allow, pure in heart, and clean in hand, and undefiled by vanity, and stedfast in truth and love to their neighbour—not only to these, but to those who have been far otherwise, but yet may become so, is the hope left of ending this life in the likeness of Christ, which began in the likeness of Adam; of ascending into the hill of the Lord, and standing for ever in His holy place.

If during these days our thoughts have mounted in triumphant anticipation to our Saviour's throne, if a more vivid sense of the reality of heaven has come upon us, if we have been transported for a moment with the marvellous thought, that we too belong to that heaven where Christ sits in glory—let us thank God for having, if but for a moment, opened His servants' eyes to the wonders of His truth, and the greatness of the heritage in store for them. Let us cherish such thoughts; for they are meant to cheer and uphold us, in the dark and dusty ways of life. But remember, that they are for a moment's encouragement, not for the daily bread of spirits yet in the flesh. We are not yet with Christ, and we must not seek to anticipate the life of rest in this life of labour and trial. We belong to Him, yet we are left a while, and kept separate from His own special company.

We meet Him now, not in high thoughts of heaven, not in ecstatic prayer, but in the persons of His little ones, in the tasks of duty, in the services of love. To these, where heaven has set our part, to these let us turn, after our souls have for a moment been raised to heaven, and we have seen Him, as He once showed Himself to His disciples, as one day He will show Himself to them all again. In these, by lowly and diligent and earnest obedience, the heart learns to become pure and the hands clean, and we prepare for that inheritance which He has waiting for us above. Our business is, for the present, doing God's will on earth. Never let us put it aside on the plea that we would fix our thoughts on Him in heaven. The joys of His presence, the silent moments which breathe of heaven, only come safely when they come unsought. While with heart and mind we ascend and dwell with Christ, let us remember that our foot must run and our hand must labour in His kingdom and service on earth. He that ascended is the same who also descended to the very lowest depths. We must not wish to ascend in joy and confidence before our time. We have still life to finish, and death to go through, and the grave to lie in, before we shall have been like Christ on earth, and before we can be like Him in His glory.

But let us cling fast to this guiding beam of light streaming down to us from the spring and fountain of truth. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor

sworn to deceive his neighbour." In all the strife of tongues, in all the uncertainties, and anxieties, and ignorance, that darken the path of man and perplex his soul, this foundation ever standeth sure—the pure in heart and the clean in hand are they whom God loves and chooses, and for whom He has prepared His holy place. There are those who tell us we do not rightly understand His message, who argue against what we hold to be true, and who mock at what we hold most dear; various and strange are the words we hear all round us, different and opposite are the ways of men in seeking for salvation. But when these things provoke and try us, as they will do sometimes, remember what is written, what sounds with the voice of God far above the strife and confusion of tongues — The pure in heart, the clean in hand, shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and shall stand in His holy place. If all other things are doubtful this is certainly true. This is at the root of everything. This is the foundation of all godliness, of all human hope. Let us cleave to it as the very rule and guide of all we do and think. Let us keep this text before us as the star of our course.

There are those to whom, in its perfect meaning, this blessedness is no longer possible. Their hands have been made unclean and their hearts impure; and by many a hard struggle, through many a fierce and fiery trial, with many a wound and many a scar, have they had to strive, with tears and self-denial and prayer, to cleanse their hearts and hands and to come back to better ways. By their bitter experience, by their fears and misgivings, by their

hard-won and dearly-bought—and perhaps still doubtful—success in coming back, oh, keep your hearts pure, your hands clean, as Christ in His goodness has allowed them so far to continue!

Pray God to keep you pure and clean; pray that you may not have to work your way back to what you ought to be through the conflicts of a hard repentance. And may He grant to us all, whether it be through a hard repentance, or by a more blessed lot, spared by Him from strong temptation, and sheltered under His wing from evil —in one way or the other—tasting His goodness or saved so as by fire—may He grant that we may come to Him with clean hands and pure hearts at the end of life; that we may be fit to rise up in His holy place, and rejoice with the saints in the awful holiness of God.

XXI

MAN AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

"Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."—St. John xx. 17.

This was the first message which the Lord sent to His Apostles after He was risen. Mary Magdalene was weeping for Him in the garden where she had seen Him laid in the tomb; and the Lord stood by her, and she thought it was the gardener till He called her by her name, and then she knew who it was. She would have detained Him; she would have worshipped Him and held Him by the feet. But it was not the time. Another time perhaps she might. But now what pressed was to send the message of consolation to His brethren; and who so fit as she to convey it? Who so fit as she, who had been so rescued, and had loved so deeply, to tell the others what had happened, and what was going to happen; to be the messenger of comfort and triumph to their humbled and desolate hearts? "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."

With the first news of the Resurrection came also the first tidings of the Ascension. With the

first news that He was come back from death, came also the news that He was going again to leave them alone on the earth as they had been when He died. He was to leave them as he had said; "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you." They were to see Him once more, but according to that saying, which had seemed so difficult to them when it was spoken, it was only because He was to go for good, because He was to come and take leave of them. "A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of the disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said? . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Here was the explanation. He was come back, but for a little while, only to go away again. They were to see Him again, and yet only for a little while, because He was on His way to the Father. And though He was come only to go away, their sorrow was to be turned into joy, and their joy no man should take away. For, though He was ascending, He was going to ascend to One

who was the same to Him and to them, to One who was to be to them what He was to Himself, "to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."

And so was completed that which had brought Him down from heaven, and made Him share the nature, and the life and death of man, and had led Him through the agony, and through the shame and humiliation of the Cross, to the accomplishment of the great Sacrifice and the conquest over death. So was completed that to which all these were the steps, the reconciling and joining together of God and man. "My Father, and your Father . . . My God and your God," said Jesus Christ to His Apostles; "My Father, and your Father . . . My God and your God," says He thenceforth to us all. "Say unto *My brethren*," is the welcome into the heavenly places and into the family of God—sent not only to those who knew Him and loved Him in the flesh, but to all those who have not seen Him and yet have believed. They are henceforth *the brethren* of Him who is ascended to the right hand of God; the God at whose right hand He is seated is their God, as He is His God; the Father who is One with the Only-begotten, is their Father, as He is His Father.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ is that which has visibly and completely joined together earth and heaven, as completely as they can be joined before the Great Day of the Lord. That which it witnesses to continually, that which it preaches to us every time that we keep Ascension Day, every time that we repeat in the Creed, "I believe that He ascended into heaven," is that man's portion is now taken up from the earth to heaven; that now he belongs to

heaven as much as he belongs to earth. In Christ's Ascension we see how the distance which there is by nature, the distance which we feel ourselves between what is so little as this world and this life, so poor and weak and sinful as ourselves, and that which is highest and holiest in the universe, has been done away. The Son of Man went up to the throne of God, that we might feel how near we had been brought to God, how near God was willing to come to us. He went up on high that we might feel that heaven was no longer a strange place to us—above our thoughts, above our hopes, too high, too marvellous for us to think of as our appointed home—but the secret and sure treasure-house where our hearts may take refuge and our hopes be kept safe; no longer a strange place, but the country to which we can now belong, the city of which we are the true citizens, the family where we have our nearest and closest friends, the rest and mansion where we are being waited for by One, who has but gone there before us.

The Son of Man went up to heaven, and took man's form and nature into heaven, that we might believe that by Him, whatever bears man's form and nature is owned and acknowledged as His kindred and of His brotherhood; that we might believe that in God's dealings, the Highest comes down to and meets the lowest; the lowest is not too low to be a partaker in all that the Highest has to give of love, of care, of work, of glory. The Son of Man went up to heaven that henceforth we might feel that we men have that interest in heaven, which persons feel in a place that was once unknown and closed to

them, but which they seem to know now, by the friends whom they have there, and by the place which is being prepared there for themselves.

You know how you feel, in general, about a foreign country. You hear its name, perhaps, repeated in conversation, you read it in books; but it is no more to you than a mere sound. It may be a great and wonderful and ancient country, where millions of men are dwelling and working, where great things happen, full of vast and beautiful cities, where men are busy and crowded in the streets and fields and roads, where they think great thoughts and accomplish mighty works. Yet for all that, what do you care about them? But let some near relation or intimate friend go there, and then how different does this mere name become to you. Even if you do not know much more about it, still it seems to you now to be a reality, and not a mere sound of words. My friend is there; therefore there really is such a place. It gives you an interest in it; it seems almost as if you had something to do with it, as if in some way it belonged to you. For some one whom you know is there. To some one whom you know, it is the dwelling-place and familiar home. In thought and fancy you can go there too; and even if you know little about it, still it is now to you a real place.

So Christ is gone into that far distant heaven, and has seemed to bring it near to us. One of ourselves, a Man like us and of our race, has actually been received up into that unspeakable glory, and there He dwells, the Son of Man still, of our kindred, our Brother. And so heaven is no longer the name

of an unknown place, a place which is to our ears something too glorious and exalted for us to think of, except as the seat of the unapproachable God. It is the resting-place and familiar home of Him who was of our blood and lineage, who is still bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. And He is gone there, that where He is there we may be also. Oh, my brethren, think of this. In heaven itself, in the highest heaven, above the angels, is One who is like in form and feature to one of us. In heaven itself, at the right hand of the Highest, is One who has been lower than the lowest of us all, who has been hung on the Cross of shame, who has been laid in the darkness of the grave, who has felt all the pains and sufferings that we have ever felt, who has wept and loved, and been mocked, and felt pity, and given comfort here among us. In heaven itself, on the throne of God, is One who has a heart which yearns as the heart of man does towards his fellow, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and thinks of the tears which we shed, and the struggles which we endure in our temptations. In heaven itself, in the glory of the Father, the eye still looks forth, still looks at us, which wept over Lazarus, and beheld Jerusalem, and was turned on Peter in the hall of judgment, and looked with sadness and love on that young Ruler who could not make up his mind to sell all and follow Him. There on the throne of all the worlds is the side that was wounded and the hands that were pierced. There, before those brows which bore the crown of thorns, and that form which wore the purple robe, the angels bow and worship. There are those lips which cried to St. Paul, "Saul,

Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" from which St. John heard the message to the Churches of Asia, and the secrets of the world to come. When we speak of heaven, we speak of the place where Jesus Christ, whose words and works and life and death we read about in the Gospels, dwells unchanged, except that He is glorified. It is the home of Christ; "whither the Forerunner is for us entered." He whom we know so much about, He who was with us thirty-three years, He who was in all things made like unto His brethren, He whose secret thoughts as well as His outward works have been so familiar to us—He is there. Whatever else we do not know and cannot imagine of that high and holy place, we know at least that He who was born at Bethlehem, and walked about in Galilee, and washed the Disciples' feet, and hung upon the Cross in the face of the sun for us, we know that He is there, and that what He was when on earth, that He is still.

And He is gone there to draw our hearts there. He is gone there to make us feel that we belong to heaven, that heaven belongs to us, that we have an interest there, that it is no strange and foreign country to us. He has gone there, and shown Himself going there, in the very form which He had among us; shown Himself, as He did to St. Stephen and St. John, still in man's nature, at the right hand of God, to make us believe that He has indeed joined together earth and heaven, the race of mankind with the throne of God. He is gone there, that heaven should be no shadowy unreal word, to mean vaguely happiness and rest and glory, but that we might understand that to be in heaven is to be with Christ,

with Him about whom we know so much, who has everything to make the heart of man love Him, and long after Him, and wish to be like Him. He has shown Himself ascending in the sight of men, that the consciousness of our inconceivable distance from Him, of our weakness and littleness, might not cut us off from the belief of our fellowship and brotherhood with Him. He ascended as He did, to show us that He did not cease to be man when He went up to where He was before, to prove to us that we had not lost Him as the Son of Man, one of ourselves, One able and willing to bear with and help our infirmities, when the time came that He was to be once more in the glory of His Father. Then He showed us how deeply and closely we are joined to Him; then He left us the word that the Father to whom He was going was our own Father too, that He and we had the same ever-blessed One for our God. He was going to His Father, but He was going to our Father also. The glory and power of God were to be His, but the God who was One with Him was to be One with us too. "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God."

Here is the great thought that this time brings with it, the thought of the close fellowship and kindred which Christ has made between earth and heaven; the thought that one of the sons of men is actually and really lifted up to the throne of God; the thought that in Him, we too, His brethren, belong to heaven. Oh, that we could take in and learn something of this truth, of this astonishing

thought! "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." If we could but feel it in its full reality, surely it would be too great to speak of. But at least let us dwell on it as we can. And not now only, not as a Sunday thought, a thought for Church and for the hours of prayer and praise. That is not the time when you most want it; that is not the time for which it was chiefly sent you; that is not the time when it may do you most good. When you are in the world, in its business, its troubles, its amusements, then is the time to recollect your fellowship with heaven, and how near that high and wondrous place has been brought to our lowliness and poverty. Think of Christ ascended, Christ sitting on the right hand of power when you come to worship Him here, but much more think of Him, of the glory and greatness to which He has been exalted, of the love and bounty which has opened the dwelling-place of God to man—much more think of this, in the mean, petty, worrying, heart-sickening trials and troubles of your week-day life. Think of it when you are tempted to be selfish, shabby, ill-natured, base-minded. Think of it when the gain, or honour, or pleasure of the world is beginning to blind your eyes and dull your heart. Then is the time to think of the heaven to which you belong, when you seem not to be able to rise above the small things that fret and tempt you to lose your patience and lose your temper; when you seem not able to see beyond the cloud of your family troubles and cares; when you think that there is

nothing in religion which has to do with making you bear small crosses religiously, or to comfort you in vexations, and when it seems easier and shorter work to complain of them and to murmur at them. When you go abroad among men and hear wrong things said, and see low, unworthy, hard things done, then lift up your eyes above all this that is "of the earth, earthy" to Him who is like yourself, yet high above all heaven, and be of good courage. Try to be like Him and not like the world. Carry this thought with you in your heart secretly. Your life may be a dull, hard-working one, with one day much like another; try and cheer it wherever you go by keeping in mind Him who sits on high and waits for you in His glory. Think of Him at home; think of Him when you are quiet, and can read and meditate; think of Him abroad, in the fields, and at work. Let the clouds of the sky preach to you of His going up. Say to yourself, On such clouds was the Son of Man taken up, behind such clouds was He last seen here, on such clouds will He be seen at last when He comes to judge the world. When you see the brightness of the noon, or the glory of the sunset, think how in brightness above the midday, and in glory more excellent than that of the sunset, is He who was once among men, toiling, teaching, suffering for us. When you see the stars of the sky, so countless and so distant, think that farther infinitely than the farthest star, the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, is ruling over all things visible and invisible, from one end of the universe to the other. Oh, wonderful Saviour, so far off and yet so near; so separated by the spaces of the

boundless heavens, and yet so close to our very hearts; so high and yet so low, so hidden and yet so revealed; dwelling where the angels are in peace and in the bliss of God, yet meeting us still in "one of these little ones," in "the form of a servant," in the poor and needy; staying up the heart of the weary and despised, listening to the child's prayer, waiting about the wretchedness and the pangs of sickness and the deathbed which no one else attends! Oh, wonderful and merciful Saviour, lift our hearts to Thee, and teach us Thy lesson to be heavenly-minded.

XXII

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever."—ST. JOHN xiv. 16.

TO-DAY is the witness and reminder to us how Christ kept His promise to His first disciples. "I will pray the Father," He said to them, when He was going to suffer, "and He shall give you another Comforter." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." And again, when He was going to ascend up into Heaven, He bade them wait for the promise of the Father, which they had heard of Him. They believed Him, and they waited. They had lost sight of Him, but they had His promise; and they remained together in Jerusalem, waiting in prayer and supplication, till He made it good. Nor did He tarry long. "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place;" a sign of that unity of spirit, and unity of body, and unity of heart, without which the Church can never expect to receive, in their fulness, the promises of Christ. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there

appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This was the outward proof of the fulfilment of the promise; but this was the smallest part of it. The Spirit did not come merely to their lips. It did not merely enable them to speak, in the ears of every nation under heaven, to each man in the tongue wherein he was born, the wonderful works of God. It went much deeper, it wrought more mightily, it brought about a more wonderful and divine change. It touched their lips indeed, but it went to dwell in their hearts. It not only gave them new words in which to understand and to preach Christ, but it enlarged their souls with new thoughts and new desires; it strengthened them with new grace, it purified and sanctified them with new holiness, it comforted them with new peace. Henceforth, the Apostles, who had only known Christ in the flesh, were to know Him so no more, but were to have Him in their hearts, dwelling there by the Spirit which He had given them. Henceforth they had no need that they should ask Him anything, for they were taught of God. Henceforth they knew what was meant when He said, "If a man love me . . . My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Henceforth they knew what the Prophets had meant, when they promised that the day should come when God would make a new covenant with His people; when He would put His law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; when He should give them

a new heart, and put a new spirit within them, and take away the stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh; when every one should know the Lord, from the least of them even unto the greatest.

This, I say, was the way in which Christ fulfilled His promise to His first disciples. He poured forth the Spirit on them from on high, and He not only poured it forth wonderfully on them, He poured it into their hearts, and made them new men, with such joy, and strength, and peace, and hope, as never men had before. Well may we praise Him for that heavenly promise, and for the faithfulness with which it was kept. If Israel blessed the Lord, when they remembered how He had wrought with their fathers, how He had delivered them from Egypt, and led them safely through the wilderness, and brought them into Canaan, well may we glorify His Name, for the far higher and more glorious things which He did for our fathers on this day of the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit. "Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them." He ascended up on high, and gave gifts to men, such as had not been given even to Moses, or to David. But for those gifts, Christ's Church never would have been set up. But for those gifts, we should have been sitting in darkness, without knowledge or hope of God. We have been brought by them into the clear light and true knowledge of Him, and His Son Jesus Christ. Well may we apply the old psalms of triumph to the days when the Spirit of God came back again, with power, as of a rushing mighty wind, to the world,

and to the tongues and hearts of men; and men were made once more temples of the Holy Ghost, fit habitations of God through the Spirit; and God said of them, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

We praise Him for what is past, and for the way in which the great promise was fulfilled to the first disciples. But the promise was not only to them, but to us also; and the fulfilment is as sure to every generation of disciples as it was to the first. That divine promise, those great gifts of sanctification, of light, of comfort, of peace, were not meant for them only. Christ did not pray for them only; He did not promise to them only, as He did not die for them only. He did not rise and go up to heaven for them only. We have our share in these things, and Christ will be as faithful to us as He was to them. The grace poured on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, is a pledge of the way in which Christ will keep His promise to all those who wait for Him, and trust Him, and obey Him, to the end of the world. By His Holy Spirit He cleansed the hearts of His Apostles; by that same Spirit He is willing to cleanse ours also. By His Holy Spirit He opened the eyes of His Apostles, that they might see the wondrous things of His law; by that same Spirit He is willing to open ours too. By His Holy Spirit He gave them power and strength to triumph, and to have victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; by that same Spirit He will give us the same power. We read in our Bibles how their souls were filled with heavenly fire, how they were lifted up from earthly thoughts and earthly fears; how they dwelt,

as it were, already in heaven,—set "in heavenly places" with Christ,—how they rejoiced even in tribulations and infirmities, how they counted all things loss for Christ; how with the world and all against them, they possessed that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Who was it who gave them all this? Who was it but that blessed Spirit, who began to dwell with them as on this day of Pentecost? And there is nothing of all this—of all this purity, and holiness, and rejoicing, and strength—that is not promised to us also; nothing of all this that we may not receive in equally full measure.

But do we have it? Do we rejoice in God as St. Paul did? Do we bear suffering and loss with the triumphant patience that He did? Have we that fountain of peace in our heart within, deep down and sure, which nothing can disturb or dry up? Are we resting on our heavenly Comforter amid the changes and chances of this mortal life? Has the promise of the Holy Ghost, the sanctifying and enlightening Spirit, the Spirit of truth and holiness, of liberty and gladness, been fulfilled to us?

The only way to tell whether it has is to compare ourselves and our way of life with the Bible. If it has, it will produce the same fruits as it produced in the days of St. Paul. "The fruit of the Spirit," says St. Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance . . . and they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." If the promise has been fulfilled to us we shall be like St. Paul and his fellow-disciples. And we shall be like them, not in

one or two points, but throughout. It is no proof of the work of the Spirit going on in us that we are like St. Paul in speaking out boldly of the Gospel; it will be no proof, because we are like St. Paul in feeling no doubts in our mind—in thinking that we can rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins; it will be no proof that we seem to enjoy undisturbed satisfaction and confidence in the Gospel. These are not enough by themselves. To be real proofs, a man must be trying to be like St. Paul throughout; not only in his comfort, or his zeal, but in his meekness, in his patience, in his charity; not only in his confident rejoicing, but in his humility, in his low thoughts of himself, in his readiness to suffer all the will of God; not only in his readiness and boldness to speak the Gospel, but in his inward cleanness of heart, in his tongue, which he keeps from evil-speaking and bitterness, in his eye, which he turns away from evil. The work of the Spirit in the soul of man is the very likeness and image of Christ; the likeness of Him whom we read of in the Gospels; the likeness of Him who was full of holiness, full of gentleness, full of self-denial, full of love; the likeness of Him, *in little* as it were—as a picture is painted smaller than the man—but yet a likeness throughout. And if we think that the work of the Spirit is anything short of this, if we think that a man can be a spiritual man who only aims at one part of this likeness without the other, we are falling into a most dangerous mistake and self-deceit.

What then can we say of ourselves? If we cannot say that we have yet received the fulfilment of our Saviour's promise, why have we not? For

the promise of that life-giving Spirit of holiness and peace, is not to a favoured few. It was meant for all to whom the Gospel should come. It was the very promise which the Gospel brought with it, and which was meant for all believers. If we have not had it fulfilled to us, it is not the fault of Him who promised; it is our own most grievous loss, and our fault alone.

Do you ask what hinders it from being fulfilled, what hinders us from receiving it? Just consider what would have happened if the Apostles, after Christ had promised them the blessed Comforter, had done what so many Christians do. Suppose that, after the Apostles had heard that gracious promise of their Master, instead of waiting upon Him in continual watchfulness and earnest prayer, they had thought only of things of this world; that one followed his pleasure, and another wasted away and idled his time, and another thought of nothing from day to day but his trade and his money—do you think that the day of Pentecost could have come to disciples who cared so little for their Master's promise? Do you think that Christ could have sent His Spirit to hearts so unfit to welcome Him? Again, suppose that, besides this worldliness and carelessness, they had departed from what Jesus Christ had taught them, and had fallen into sin, and had indulged in riot and wicked pleasures, had liked to think over evil things in their minds, had been greedy and selfish and ill-natured, had spoken bad words, words of falsehood, or pride, or malice—can you imagine that the day of Pentecost could have come for such transgressors and backsliders?

Can you suppose that the Spirit would have shed His grace on such polluted and foul tongues, or come to dwell in such rebellious and bad hearts? Or, once more, suppose that instead of obeying Christ's commandment to love one another, and abide together like brethren in unity, they had begun by quarrelling and strife, they had each set up to be something better and wiser than their brethren, do you think that Christ would have sent His Spirit on that divided body? Do you think that He who had prayed that His disciples might be one, would have owned them as His servants and Apostles, if they had begun at once to break up into parties, and say, I am of Cephas, and I of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Christ?

If the Apostles had done all this, that day of Pentecost could not have been. Christ must first have raised up truer Apostles before He could have fulfilled His promise. Let us apply this to ourselves. If we are still wanting the fulness of the blessing, it is not Christ who fails in His promise; it is we, who by our carelessness of that promise, by our worldliness, by our evil lives, by our quarrels and divisions, will not let Him fulfil it. How can we expect Him to send it to us, if we think and care nothing about that Holy Spirit and those things which the Spirit brings with Him—a holy heart, a heavenly mind? How can we expect to receive it when we pass our days without prayer, or with the most miserable and pitiful excuses and pretences for prayer? God will not give us, certainly, what we do not care about, especially when that is the most precious of all the things that He has to give us in

this life. No one is pleased to have his gifts despised or undervalued. God will not endure such scorn from us, any more than we should bear it from one another. And again, God will not give us what we do not earnestly pray for. He will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, that ask Him in earnest, that ask in a right way. But it must not be expected that He will give it to those who think it too much trouble to ask for it, who wait for it without praying for it; who pray for it, but do not care enough about it to try and pray earnestly and sincerely. How, again, can we expect the fulfilment of the promise as long as sin rules over us? How can we expect it while we go on doing wrong, and saying to ourselves that it does not matter, that all will be well at last? Will the Spirit come and dwell with the drunkard, with the swearer, with the adulterer, with the liar, with the evil-speaker, with the deceitful, with the false accuser, with the lover and thinker of evil? Surely Christ might as well dwell with Satan, and light with darkness. These things drive far away the Spirit of God, of God who is light, and holiness, and love; and till the way is prepared for Him by deep and true and unfeigned repentance, a repentance not of words but of deeds, we must not think that He can ever come back.

And again, how can we expect Him to come as He came of old, where He finds us like a house divided against itself, quarrelling and fighting with one another; when He sees us making sure of His help, and then becoming, not more humble and patient, but more wise in our own conceits, more self-willed, more scornful; when He finds us more busy to show

forth our own spiritual attainments to others, than really, in quiet earnest, to work out the inner sanctification of our souls; when He sees jealousies, and evil-surmisings, and party spirit filling the minds of men, and tearing asunder those whom Christ meant to be one, one in body, and one in spirit, and one in faith. If there is any truth in the Gospel, these things must be mighty hindrances to the real work of the Spirit of truth and love in the Church; and deep indeed ought to be our sorrow of heart for any share that we may have had in them. "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ," says St. Paul, "if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. . . . Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

If the consolation of Christ, if the fellowship of the Spirit, of which the Bible says so much, are more than mere words, let us beseech Him to turn our hearts one to another, and knit them together in love and unity; to cleanse them from evil, worldly, self-seeking desires; to lift them up to see and to wish for the liberty and truth of a heart right with God; to deliver them from all delusions and deceits. As He has granted us faith, may He also grant us His peace and His love. May He who has been the Comforter of all faithful souls be our Comforter also, both by day and night, all through the days of our journey; may the Comforter of the Apostles in all their afflictions be our very Comforter also, in grief and all distress;

may He who is the fountain and living spring of heavenly joy be our Comforter to the end, and at the last dreadful day. Let us beseech Him to teach us to know ourselves, to know that He requires "truth in the inward parts;" let us beseech Him to make us a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within us; to give us the comfort of His help again, and to stablish us with His free Spirit. Let us beseech Him, not in words only, but in all deep and solemn earnest, "to grant us true repentance, and His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy; so that at the last we may come to His eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

XXIII

THE HOLY TRINITY

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."—St. JOHN i. 18.

WE keep Trinity Sunday in remembrance of the much fuller knowledge of God which we Christians have received in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have learnt about Almighty God what nature never could have shown us—what our own thoughts and understanding would not have found out. We have learnt to know Him not only as the Maker of heaven and earth, the great Ruler whose will all things serve, who is far above all heavens, and to whom nothing can be compared or made like; but also as the God of the souls of men, the helper of their weakness, their hope in sin and sorrow. We have learnt to know Him as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three in One and One in Three—the Father sending the Son to redeem the world, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son coming down to dwell in us, and to make men good and holy, even as God our Father is good and holy. This is what we have learnt in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what we gather when we think over all the wonderful dealings of

God which we have been celebrating, one by one, from Christmas to Whitsuntide. We look back on them all. We see One born for us, crucified for us, raised again for us, ascended into heaven for us, sending down His gifts on us from the Father's right hand; and we find that He who thus came as the Son of Man, was also the only-begotten Son of the Everlasting Father—God, as His Father is God—God made Man. And we see also the Spirit sent by the Father and the Son, teaching, enlightening, comforting, sanctifying the souls of men, as only God can do. And we find that the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, is God also. Each is undoubtedly God—the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit; each does what none can do but God; each is spoken of and spoken to as none can be but God. And yet we also know that there is but one God. And thus we learn that gracious mystery, which we confess and give thanks for to-day—that wonderful glimpse into the secret of the nature of our God, which could no longer be hidden from us, when the Son came to die for us, and the Spirit to teach and sanctify us—namely, that in the glorious majesty of the one Eternal God are three Persons, joined together and yet not the same. And we praise them and worship them—Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth—Maker, Redeemer, Sanctifier—Father, Son, and Spirit, which was, and is, and is to come—the one Lord most high.

This is the great lesson of Trinity Sunday—that it is through Jesus Christ, and through Him alone, that we can be said truly to know Almighty God. As St. John tells us in the text, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in

the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Christ has explained and interpreted God to man. And He tells us the same Himself. "He that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me." Father and Son are one. Father and Son are so united in the excellent majesty and perfect holiness of their Divine nature, that whosoever saw the Son even in man's flesh, in His mortal body, in the form of a servant, saw in very truth, the immortal and invisible Father. It was so strange and wonderful a thing, that even His chosen Apostles were astonished and perplexed by it. "No man," He said, "cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." Philip could not think that the Lord meant what He said; he could not believe that, in seeing the Son, he had also seen the Father. "Lord," said Philip, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Mark the answer of Jesus Christ, for the answer is not to Philip alone, but to all of us, to all who ever have Christ set before them, to believe in, to love, and to trust to; to all who with the eyes of the understanding, behold Him, as the Bible sets Him before us, in His deeds and words, in His sufferings and glory, in His Divine beauty and purity and holiness. Jesus answered Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth

the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake." In Jesus Christ we see the Father, as far as He can be known of man. In Jesus Christ is the fullest and most perfect revealing of what God is, what He loves, what He does and will do. Only in Jesus Christ can we know Him, as our hearts need to know Him, that they may rejoice and be strong, and put their full trust in Him, that they may live and not die.

Only in Jesus Christ can we know God. The world which He made tells us indeed of Him. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of His glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." So says the Psalm, and it is indeed true. All round us are the works of His power, His wisdom, His goodness. Whether we look to the stars, and sky, and clouds above—whether we look to the grass, and the trees, and the corn beneath—when the winds blow, and the rain falls, and the sun arises every morning and brings us light, and the night comes back at eventide and brings us rest; whether we look to the great mountains, or the ever-fruitful fields, or the sea in its boundlessness; when we think of ourselves, our souls and bodies so fearfully and wonderfully made; all things tell of Him in whose hand is everything, visible and invisible, the paths of worlds, the very hair of our

heads, the breath of every living thing. All things tell of One, most mighty, most wonderful in all His works. All tell of Him, of that dreadful and wonderful One out of our sight, who is so far off, and yet so near; whose bounty we live upon, but whose mind we cannot understand; whom we cannot escape from, but whom we know not how to meet; veiled in eternal mystery, but with whom we have so much to do, and on whom we entirely depend.

That is what the Almighty God is to us by nature. We know that He *is*, but scarcely more. We know that He is good and wise, as well as great and strong, but darkness is on His steps, and we see but hardly how His goodness and wisdom are made clear. Go where we will, we find Him, yet go where we will, in vain we try to know Him. "If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to hell, Thou art there also." And yet, as Job says, "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." The Infinite, Almighty, All-glorious, Invisible God—*who* by nature shall know Who He is and where He dwells; *who* shall understand His mind and thoughts, or trace His ways, or comprehend His nature?

But for Jesus Christ, we could only worship Him afar off, as the unknown God. Often in the depths of our ignorance, in the extremity of our despair, we could have nothing else to say but to confess, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself;" or to cry out, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." But His only-begotten Son, He hath declared to us

the Father. He has shown us the image and holiness of the unseen God. He has come from the light in which the Father dwells, and in Him and through Him, that eternal and holy light shines in the darkness of the world. In Him—God of God, of one substance with the Father, One with the Father—we behold what God is. In the mind of Jesus Christ we read the mind of God. In the character of Jesus Christ we learn all that man can know of the character of God. In the deeds of Jesus Christ we behold the love, and pity, and tenderness, and long-suffering of the Father. In the words of Jesus Christ we hear the judgments of God, and the truth as it is known and seen and upheld by God. All that Jesus Christ did and said, all that He bore, all that He triumphed over, is so much light thrown on the thoughts, and purposes, and dealings of the unseen God; for they were the words and deeds, and sufferings and glory, of One who was Himself verily and really One with God. We see in Jesus Christ, One who was without spot or stain of sin—righteous and holy without mixture or shade of evil; loving goodness, and hating iniquity, tried and tempted, but always perfect. And we see in Him, as in a mirror, the reflection of the spotless goodness of God. We see in Him that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." We see in Jesus Christ, One who gave up the glory of heaven for the poverty and pains of earth; One, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" thought not that awful unshared prerogative—the being equal with God—a thing to be kept for Himself—"but made Himself of no reputation, and

took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. And in that most awful and most consoling Sacrifice, we see what the thought and imagination of man could never have dreamed of the love of God to man. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We learn that God is love itself, and can be known by none but by those who are like Him by the love in their hearts. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. . . . No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. . . . Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. . . . God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." In every miracle of mercy that Christ wrought, we behold the pity and tenderness of His Father. In every word of warning or of reproof of Christ, we hear the voice of the unseen Father calling sinners from the inevitable doom of sin — confirming and urging home that just judgment of truth and righteousness, which our consciences have all along told us will be, and must be, the only rule of His government. And when Christ cries aloud, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,

and I will give you rest;" "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink;" "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out;" "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die;"—when He gives the promise, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth;" "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him;" when He gives His parting assurance, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you;"—when we hear these voices of the Son, we learn indeed, *Who*, and of what sort, is the Father, in His mind and purposes towards us—the eternal, unseen, Almighty Father, who made the stars and the sky, and the mountains and the sea; but of whom the stars and sea and mountains could tell us nothing of what He felt towards men, of what comfort men might seek in Him, how men might know and love Him as their Father, and how He would come and dwell in their hearts, and prepare them to be with Him in glory, when all that is of this world shall have passed away.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life," said our Lord; "no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." No one can know the Father but by the Son; no one can know Him as He is to be known, except the Son reveals Him to us. And this, as He says Himself, "This is life eternal," to "know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

May we so know Him as He is known in His ever-blessed Son—so know Him as that Son wishes us to know Him, and is ready to make us know Him! May we know Him—not only as the unseen, incomprehensible Power, who can do what He likes with us and all things, whose ways we cannot see or guess at—not only as One whose hand is heavy as well as bountiful, before whose greatness we are as nothing—but much more as Him who is the lover and Father of men, the God of truth and righteousness to all, the God whose eyes are upon all His works in merciful and loving wisdom, who pities the sinners and forgives the sin, who hears the prayer and fills the soul with grace and gladness.

May we know Him as the God who, though far above us, yet dwells and strives with the spirit of man; who, though so great and powerful, yet is so gentle towards us, so patient, so forbearing, so tender, that to Him our hearts turn in all our needs and fears, and in Him is our trust, and comfort, and assured hope. May we know Him here as the giver of peace, speaking within us in the still small voice, which we can hear alike in the silence, or in the noise and uproar of the world. May we know, and fear, and love Him here as our shield, behind whom we need fear nothing else. And may we know Him by and by, when we have passed away from here, as our exceeding great reward—the satisfier of our longings, the fulfiller of our hopes.

XXIV

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD BY PRAYER

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us."—1 St. John iv. 12.

Does it never come into your thoughts how strange a thing it is that One whom we talk of so much, we never see, we never can see here, no man has ever seen? No one has ever seen God. He whom we all know by name; He who is over everything; He who is the greatest of all things that are; He on whom we depend for our daily bread, for the breath of our nostrils; He whom we know it to be our chief duty to obey; He whom we call upon and pray to; He whom we tremble before in our sins and our repentance, and to whom we stretch forth our hands in the hour of distress and danger; He whom we acknowledge as the Maker of all things, our Master and Judge who can do with us what He wills—yet Him we can never see. He is so nigh to us, and yet so utterly beyond our touch; we may feel His presence, we may be sure that He is ordering all that happens to us, yet, do what we will, live as long as we may, we shall never see Him. He is a hidden God, though the world could not last a

moment unless He was close at hand. We talk of Him, think of Him, know that He is there; but no sign does He ever give, no message now comes from Him, His voice never speaks aloud. Is it not strange, I say, when we come to think of it, that we have so much to do with One whom here we can never know and never see. Is it not strange that He is so familiar to us though He has never shown Himself? He is the greatest, the most important, of all whom we have to do with, and yet all that He does, for us and to us, goes on through a veil, which never lets us catch sight of Him, or even know that He is there.

Well then, how do we know Him? How do we know God at all? I do not mean, how are we to know about Him, about His nature, His commandments, His dispensations to men. *That* we have many ways of learning. *That* we learn by thinking, and considering, and watching His wonderful works, and hearing of His great doings on our behalf. *That* we may learn from the Bible, which is the book God has sent us, that in it we may learn His will and His ways. But to learn and to know about God is not the same thing as to know God. We may know a great deal about Him and yet be a long way from knowing Him. Just as with men among whom we live. We may know a great deal about a person, we may have read a great deal about him, and be able to tell of his ways and of his history, and yet not know him; not know him personally, and as we know our friends. And as it is with men, so is it with God. To know all that can be known about God is not the same thing, by a great deal, as knowing God.

How th n are we to become acquainted with

God? How are we to come to that knowledge of Him which Job expresses, though in a figure, when he says, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee:" meaning, of course, not that his eye actually saw God, but that he felt as if he did? Now consider, How do we get to know our friends? How do we get acquainted with them, get intimate with them, get to feel that we understand them and that they understand us, get to feel that our hearts are joined together, that our spirit answers their spirit? How does this come about? How, I say, do men on earth come to know one another?

There is only one way that I ever heard of; and that is, by having communication one with another. It need not be by seeing one another, and talking face to face, and hearing each other's voices, though this is with most men a very great part of all communication and intercourse. But it need not be this. People may become acquainted, and intimate, who have never seen each other. Without having ever heard the other's voice, each may come to know perfectly the other's mind and heart; each may become deeply and for ever interested in, and attached to the other. But for this to be, there must be communication of some sort. If they cannot talk to one another they must write to one another. Something there must be, passing between them, which carries to each a living knowledge of what the other is, and thinks, and feels. Something there must be, which is a sign and witness to the one, of what is passing in the other's heart and mind. Something there must be, by which each can show that he is doing

more than merely thinking about his friend; that he can send him something, and receive back something in return. He may do this best, no doubt, by conversation face to face, by voice and look; but he may also do it, though seas roll between, by writing. But some communication there must be, of one kind or another, or there can be no acquaintance, no friendship; and this communication must be continual, must be hearty, sincere, and open; and it must be communication and intercourse in which there is love and liking, and the wish to know more, or it will never lead to our becoming friends with a person, or getting to know him well.

Now, in what I have said about the way of getting to know men, I have answered the question, How we are to come to know God—not to know *about* God, but to know God, which is a very different thing. We must get to know Him by intercourse and communication with Him. There is no other way possible; exactly as there is no other way possible of getting to know our fellow-men. They are spirits as we are spirits, as God is a Spirit. And spirit must meet and hold converse and communication with spirit, before either can know, or be really acquainted with the other.

There is no doubt this great difference between knowing men and knowing God, that God is always hidden, that His voice never sounds in our outward ears, that we are never conscious of His presence. We must speak, but we get no answer which mortal ears can hear. We must go on from day to day, saying what we have to say, without the joy which we have with our earthly friends, of hearing what our

words and thoughts and affections draw forth from their hearts. We have to spend our hearts and love in it, and we receive no sign, that we can make certain of, of the answering love of God. We gaze up into the empty air or the thick darkness, we address our words to the eternal silence. That is to say, in this as in all other things, we walk by faith and not by sight. By faith only, not by sight, can we attain to, or enjoy, the knowledge of God. But this does not prevent what I said from being true. By communication, and intercourse, and converse with God, and by this only, can we attain to the knowledge of God. But by this we can attain to it. For by faith we can converse with God; and by this conversation with Him, men can come, in very deed and truth, to know Him; not merely by the hearing of the ear to have heard of Him—but by the open and living eye of faith to see Him, to feel sure *what* He is, to know that He is indeed our Friend and Father—to know for a certainty that love which passeth knowledge.

Need I tell you what is the common name for intercourse, communication, converse with God? You hardly want me to tell you that what we call converse, intercourse, communication, when it is between man and man, is called prayer when it is between man and God. Yes, prayer is the only way by which man can know God. For it is only by our spirit addressing itself to God, meeting God, speaking what is in it to God, that man, who is a spirit, can know and feel that he knows God, who is a Spirit; and to do this, is to pray.

Now we see why prayer is the very life of all

godliness. For to know God is eternal life, and we can only come to know God by prayer. There is no other way. It is only by continued and well-kept-up intercourse with our heavenly Friend, that we can possibly come to know anything of One so great, so wonderful, so perfect in all goodness and wisdom and truth. And prayer must be hearty and sincere, full of love, and desire to know and to love more. So only does knowledge of a friend grow and increase on earth: so only will knowledge grow and increase of our Eternal and Divine Saviour and Father in heaven. Therefore it is that His book, the Bible, calls on us so earnestly by command, by example, by all the wonderful models of prayer of which it is full, to pray, to pray without ceasing, to pray in public and private, constantly, in all frames of mind, in joy and sorrow, in hope and in desolation; morning and noon and evening, to pray; to accustom our hearts to prayer, to prayer of every kind, secret and open, expressed or only felt in the depths of the heart—prayer of every kind, so that it is true and serious and real, and that it is offered in the love of God, and in the grace of God. And, my brethren, if in this way you try to acquaint yourselves with God, and to hold converse and communication with Him, fear not because He is hidden from the eye of the body, and dwells in the "light which no man can approach unto." Fear not that you will be left to keep up the converse only on your side. Fear not that it will only be the breathing of your heart to God without any return or answering sign from Him. I cannot say how He will meet your prayers. I cannot say how He will give evidence that His ear

is listening, that His infinite love is more than flowing back upon yours which ascends to Him. But I am sure that if your prayers are true and persevering, you shall know for a certainty that you have not been speaking to emptiness, speaking to the air, to an ear that did not listen; but that you have been speaking to One who lives, that you have been breathing your thoughts and feelings to a Spirit—like yourself, though so far above you—the Father of spirits Himself. In one way or another you shall in due time find proof that you have been praying to One who has sent back on you something from Himself. It may be one thing or it may be another, grace, or comfort, or joy, or strength, or opening light, or the consciousness of His goodness, or the taste of His heavenly love, and the realising of His presence. One thing or another you shall surely find, coming into your spirit according as you pray, and preparing you according to your faith, according to your measure, and talent, and gift, according to the wisdom of God, for that day when we may hope to see Him face to face, and to know even as we are known.

XXV

HOLY BAPTISM

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."—GALATIANS iii. 27.

A BAPTISM is one of the most solemn of sermons. A baptism sets before our eyes a picture of God's dealings with men to save their souls. It embraces in a few words a summing up of all that the Bible was written to teach us, of that which we are to believe, of that which we are to do, of that which God has promised us, of that which God has given us. It shows us, as in a looking-glass, what has been done by God for each one of us; and we can judge while we look on at it, how we have kept, each one for himself, the covenant of our God and Redeemer. Every prayer, every text, every question, every answer, applies to each bystander, as truly and with as much importance as to the child who is baptized. They are a witness against us if we have broken our pledge with God, and turned rebels against Him by sin; and a warning, if, knowing our sins, we refuse to come back to Him by earnest and true repentance. They are a renewal of His offers of grace and His calls to return, if, like the prodigal son in the parable, we feel that we have sinned

against heaven and our heavenly Father, and are no more worthy to be called His children; they are an encouragement and comforting assurance of His continuing help, if we are trying to live our life according to that beginning, when we were baptized into Jesus Christ, and if we are doing what we can to fight manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil.

A baptism shows us a likeness or figure of what was the state of mankind, and of our souls, before Christ came to redeem us. Nothing can be a more striking image of that state than the poor helpless, crying, ignorant child, who is brought here to enter into a covenant with God. Just as the child is utterly unable to help itself, so were we and all mankind unable to help ourselves in the saving of our souls. Just as the child cannot take care of itself, so we, if we had been left to ourselves, must have perished. Just as the child cannot provide food for itself, so we could never by ourselves have been able to get the Bread of Life. Just as the child could do nothing to save itself even from the weakest of its enemies, so our souls by nature could not defend themselves from the attacks of any of those evil things which seek their destruction, much less against that mighty enemy the devil. Just as the child knows nothing—nothing of God, nothing of those to whom it owes everything, nothing of the parents who love it so dearly, and are ready to do everything and to bear so much for its sake, nothing of the dangers of life, nothing of the course which lies before it,—so it was with mankind. They knew nothing of God, they knew nothing of Him who was their

Maker and Preserver, though they depended on Him for everything; they gave Him no thanks for His care and love for them; they knew nothing of the dangers to their souls which were on all sides of them; they knew nothing of where they were to go to after they were dead, of what was to become of them, of what God had meant them for hereafter. Just as the child is who can do nothing good, can deserve nothing, can have no claim, except its utter weakness, so are we. We could of ourselves deserve nothing from God, we could do nothing that should make us deserve that He should do us any good; we had but one claim on His goodness, that He had made us, and that we were so utterly helpless of ourselves. We could only come to Him, and call on Him, as the little infant makes its appeal, by dumb cryings and sounds of distress and pain.

A baptism then, in which a helpless child is brought before God, is the true representation of what mankind in general were in the sight of God, when Adam's fall had brought sin and death into the world. But a baptism also represents the other side of the picture; not only the helplessness of man to save himself, but the greatness and abundance of God's mercy towards him. Helpless and ignorant as the child is, this does not prevent him from being received into the family of God, and being made a child of God; this does not prevent us from praying that Christ would embrace him with the arms of His mercy, and give him the blessing of eternal life; this does not prevent us from believing that what Jesus Christ has promised in His Gospel, even to infants, He will for His part most surely keep and perform.

Surely, never does the Church make a more solemn declaration of the free grace of Jesus Christ, than when it brings a little child to be baptized, and asks —and not only asks, but believes that it does not ask in vain—for a share in God's grace; for the new birth, for the gift of the Holy Ghost, for the death of the old Adam, for the blessing of sanctification here, and for everlasting life hereafter. And so, just as God receives the child helpless as it is, so has God received mankind, in spite of all their corruptions, of all their sins, of all their blindness and helplessness. He has not measured His gifts by our deserving. He has not measured them by our knowing what to ask for. We lay before Him lost and ruined, without power to do anything to save ourselves. And He, though we were so wretched and so weak, poured upon us such gifts and such promises, as were beyond man's thought to imagine or hope for. He did not wait till we were fit to receive them. He went before us; and while we were still without strength, and yet in our sins, He freely forgave us, He freely gave His Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify us, He freely opened to us the kingdom of heaven. We hear in the baptismal service, and sometimes hear with astonishment, such things promised to a little infant; we pray for what the oldest Christian might desire, and we hear promises made to him which the holiest and most experienced servant of Christ might hail with gladness. We wonder that such high and solemn things are done and said about a mere child. But do not let us wonder. What the speechless, helpless child is in our eyes, that, and less than that, are we and all mankind in the eyes of Almighty God. The

wonder is not that such glorious things are spoken of him, but that such glorious things as the Gospel has revealed should be spoken of mankind at all. The wonder is not that so helpless a creature should be received into such grace, and should be called to partake of God's grace, "without money and without price"—this is not the wonder, seeing that he too is a child of Adam, one for whom Christ shed His blood; the wonder is, that we, being what we are, the Eternal God should have such regard to us, should give His grace so freely and so abundantly, should choose us for His portion, should receive us for His children, should send His Son to die for us, should put His Spirit into our hearts, should desire and delight in our love and service, should have prepared a place where we might be with Him for ever.

Thus does a baptism put before our eyes an example, a living, actual example, of man's weakness and worthlessness, of God's abundant, overflowing grace and mercy, whereby He meets us beforehand, and gives us more than we can either desire or deserve. Thus does a baptism preach to us the great doctrines of the Gospel, of man's sin and ruin, and of his redemption; of the infinite love of God and Christ, of the preciousness of that Blood by which our souls are washed from their sins, of the necessity of being born anew, of a second and heavenly birth of the Spirit, of being changed and renewed and transformed, from the likeness of sinful Adam, into the likeness and image of Christ. And as solemnly as it preaches to us of what God has done for us, of what we could not do for ourselves, of what none could do for us but God, so solemnly does it preach

to us of what, as Christians, we are bound to do; of how, as Christians, we are bound to live; of what, as Christians, we are bound to hope for. You heard those questions asked so solemnly in the name of God and of His Church, and answered in the presence of God, and to God. "Dost thou . . . renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them?" "Dost thou believe in God . . . and in Jesus Christ . . . His Son, . . . and in the Holy Ghost, . . . and in the Resurrection of the flesh; and everlasting life after death?" "Wilt thou be baptized in this faith?" "Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?" You heard the questions asked and you heard them answered. There was the covenant made between God and the soul brought to Him to be saved, between God and the soul fleeing to Him for succour, that it might escape the pains of death and inherit everlasting life. And there was the covenant, made not by this soul only, but by us all. There we heard what we are bound by, what we have all promised, what we shall be judged by, whether we have tried to keep it or no. These questions have in truth as much to do with every one who hears them as they have to do with the one child in whose name you have heard them answered. You hear again, my brethren, your own promises, the words that have come out of your own mouths, the conditions which you have accepted as being Christians, the pledge which you have taken

and bound on your souls. You must keep that pledge or you must perish. You must hold to those conditions, or you must give up all hope of what is promised you, *only* on those conditions. You must stand to that covenant which you have over and over again repeated, which you are professing by being here to-day, or else you are breaking your faith and your word, not to man, but to the true and living God. Is not this a solemn sermon to you? Is it not a warning to touch your hearts, not only to be told of, but to see again with your eyes, the making afresh of such a covenant as you must yourselves be judged by? Can any words be more touching and moving than to see that which sets before our outward eyes the picture of Christ taking up the little children in His arms, putting His hands on them, blessing them, and saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me"? Do we not see here the picture of the washing from sin, the death to sin, the new birth to righteousness? And are we not moved when we hear said of that child that which was once said and promised and hoped of all of us? Let us hear those solemn questions of the Christian covenant addressed to ourselves. Let us ask ourselves how we could answer if we were asked *now* how we had kept them, how we were minded to keep them for the future. Let us turn our thoughts in on ourselves, and ask ourselves faithfully whether we have kept the covenant of our baptism; and let us search out narrowly those sins, open or secret sins, by which we have broken it, in which we have followed the devil and his works which we then renounced, and have given our hearts to the world and

its covetous desires which we promised to give up, and have indulged the carnal lusts and desires of the flesh which we said we would not be led by. Let us take these questions to ourselves. They are home questions indeed: "remembering always, that Baptism doth represent unto us our profession; which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him; that, as He died, and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."

One more point which a baptism very solemnly brings before our mind. We see in it the beginning, the first start of a Christian life. We pray that the child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning. But, alas! who knows, who can tell, whether he will do so? Who can tell how the life of that newly-baptized Christian will end; where that new-born soul shall finish its course—in heaven or with the lost? Who can help thinking, when he brings his child to be baptized, What will become of my child's soul? Where will it be found at last? What course will it choose when it grows up? It must come into our minds at that moment that all who have made this blessed beginning have not come to a blessed end. How many have had the same prayers said over them, have received the same grace and promises, have been looked upon by their fathers and mothers with the same tenderness and hope—and where are they now? How little good has it been to them that they were once received by Christ

and blessed by Him? What is it to them that they were once made God's children, now that they have become the children of Satan? And of each single child, who can tell what he will turn out? Who can foresee whether his parents may not live long enough to wish that he had died the day of his baptism? Surely there can be no more anxious and awful thought in the heart of fathers and mothers on the day of a baptism than this; a thought to make them pray earnestly that what *may* happen, what *has* happened to multitudes, may not be the end of this beginning to their child.

But not to them only. To us all a baptism may well bring the same awful thoughts. You have begun well; you have begun in grace; you have begun life as a child of God, and an heir of heaven. That grace and that hope, you could not lose but by your own fault. But by your own fault, by your sins and rebellion, you may lose it all. Our baptism makes us children of God, and heirs of everlasting life; and while we keep the covenant, we keep the privilege and the promise. But what we once had we may lose. Though we once were in God's favour we may have forfeited it; though we were once received into the number of His children, we may have despised our birthright and thrown it away. In a baptism we see how we began, what we were once. Now, let us ask ourselves how we have grown up, what we are become, what we are now? Are we among those to whom their baptism and their covenant with God has done no good? Have we wandered away from that begining, which, if we had kept to it, would have led us

step by step nearer and nearer to God? Have we gone away from our Father's house, and turned our back on His love, and given up hoping for that eternal life which once was ours, which once was pledged to us, when we promised our heart and obedience to Him? If we have done so—and who in one degree or another has not?—let the baptism which we have seen to-day recall to us the time when we yet had not willingly rebelled against God; when life was yet all before us, unstained by evil and corrupt doings, all before us for us still to choose whose side we would take, whose service we would follow, God's or Satan's. And when God had received and blessed us, then it was hoped and prayed that we might keep the grace He had given us, and continue in that calling to which His free mercy had chosen us, and lead the rest of our lives according to that beginning. Let us think of the time when we were as this child is to-day—with all God's love pledged to us, with all these prayers said for us. And can we bear to think that by what has happened since, we have thrown it away and lost it? Can we forbear to wish that it might be once more ours? Can we bear to think that we were once heirs of God, and that now we have wilfully deprived ourselves of that blessed portion? Can we endure to think of such a fall?

May God, in His mercy, give us grace to remember our baptismal covenant with Him. May He make us feel that in those prayers and promises, which we hear so often said for our children, we are hearing our own deepest condemnation, if we are not living according to them. And

according as each of us has broken that covenant, and strayed away from that holy beginning, to follow what we had renounced, may He give us the spirit of true repentance, the broken and contrite heart, the earnest longing for our Father's forgiveness, and the restoration of His favour; that we may come to Him, feeling ourselves unworthy, like the Prodigal, of the love and grace which we have despised, yet, like him, praying that we may be received again to God's mercy. "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son."

XXVI

THE PRESENT TIME AND THE END

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."—2 ST. PETER iii. 3-4.

THERE is something in these words which makes them even more solemn to us than they could have been to the people to whom they were first written. For the time, and the state of things which they speak of, is actually come upon us in a way which could only be looked forward to, when St. Peter wrote. The last days, which he spoke of, were then very far off. Probably he himself was not made to know how far off they were. Probably, with all his feeling of the immensity, the immeasurableness of God's Eternal Being, he would have been startled to be told, that even after eighteen hundred years had passed away, still Christ would not have come back. We have been appointed to run our short course of life in these last days. We have been appointed to look back along that line of years to which St. Peter looked forward. He saw the long endless road before him, which the Church and the world, and the generations of mankind were to pass

along. He looked at it, as many of us may have looked from a place where we could see a long way, on the distant road that we were to travel, running across the flat, or winding miles away up the hill-side and over the down. But to us the road has been passed over, and is far behind. And long as it has been, the Lord is not yet come. And it is hardly wonderful that there should be some among us who, walking after their own lusts and sins, are led to scoff at the promises and commands of God: it is not wonderful that among them there should be found those who say, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

The times in which we are living are different from those in which St. Peter lived. Then, Christ our Lord had been but a few years before among men; but a few years before, He had lived, had taught, had wrought His mighty works, had died, had risen again from the dead, and had gone up into heaven before the eyes of His Apostles. In those days, men had had a close and startling sight of the power and majesty of God. The veil which separates man and the earth from the sight of God and His workings, had been drawn aside; and that generation saw, and had proof of the neighbourhood and presence of the Eternal God, which other ages have only known by hearing and by faith. But that was only for a moment. Christ was shown, and then withdrawn from the eyes of men; and the world was left to go on in its accustomed way. And that is the state of the world into which we were born; with the

remembrance, the assurance, the certain proofs that Christ has been among us, and has set up the kingdom of heaven upon the earth; but with the world now going on in its common way, as before He came—all things continuing as they were since the beginning of the creation. Summer comes in the time of summer, winter follows in its proper order. In its due time the sun gets high, and the sun gets low. In its due time the seed is sown, and the harvest reaped and gathered in. In their due time the bright warm days pass away, and the light is shorter, and the air becomes fresh and keen. So it has been for the eighteen hundred years since Christ was amongst us. So it was for the hundreds and thousands of years before He came.

Now, what is St. Peter's advice to us, living, as we do, in this settled order of the world, without anything happening to show us what is behind the veil, what is doing in heaven, what God is thinking of, what is one day to be the end of all things? St. Peter's words seem to be written for such times as ours.

He bids us remember that this settled order of the world, so settled that it seems as if nothing could shake it, is, after all, only for a time. The world was once made out of nothing, by the power of God; and by the same awful and inconceivable power, the world is, one day, to be brought to an end. It is not more strange that it should be destroyed, than it is that it should once have been made. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. . . . But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same

word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." Steadfast and solid as all things are, the rising and setting of the sun, the changes of the seasons, the returns of the year, they once were not, and the time will come when they will cease to be. More than that we know not. We cannot imagine and understand how God made the world, how He keeps it all, with all its wonders, with all its living creatures, men, and beasts, and fishes of the sea, and creeping things —how God keeps it all so settled and so unfailing. Neither can we imagine or understand how He will bring it all to an end, and what is to be in the place of it. But He made, and He is in due time to make an end. He gave, and He is to take away.

But, as St. Peter goes on to say, no one can guess when ; no one can guess how soon, or at how distant a day. For what seems a long time or a short time to us, is neither one nor the other in the sight of God. "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." God's measures of time are not ours. And we cannot even guess how God does His works ; how God made the world, how He brings into existence now each thing that has life. Nor can we guess what a long time or a short time are to Him. All we know is our own ignorance ; the certainty that we cannot possibly know or understand how He sees and thinks of what is a long time doing, and of what is a short way off.

But the practical lesson for all this is plain. Everything, though it seems settled for ever and continuing as it was since the creation of the world, is

but for a time, and is to pass away. But how long it is to continue, and when it is to pass away, is what man can never know or understand. God who upholds all things, He only knows how long and how short a time they are to be for. What we do know is this: that if God waits, if it is long before the end comes, longer than we should have expected, it is because of the goodness and long-suffering of God to men. God has not forgotten the world and His promise. God has not forgotten that Christ is to come again to judge, and to set right what is wrong; to redeem and gather His people to Himself. God has not forgotten that the earth and mankind are longing and yearning for their Deliverer; waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. God knows and marks all this. But with Him is the fixed time. When all is over, when all is revealed, we shall perhaps be able to see that the time of waiting has not been long. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Patiently He waits till all have had their time—their chance, if I may so speak—in this world, for repentance and amendment and forgiveness and improvement, in which to rise out of sin and evil and mistakes, into goodness and holiness and truth. Patiently He waits till all have been tried, all have taken their side. The better must wait for the less good; those who are ready for those who are not ready; the perfect for the imperfect; the conquerors for those still struggling with their temptations. For He, the Lord of all,

waits patiently and with long-suffering, and He cuts short no man's opportunity of hope. But no one knows *when* He who sees all things, all hearts, and how in all hearts the battle between good and evil, truth and sin, is going on—no one knows *when* He who sees all things will end the trial, and bring all things to an end. The day of the Lord, the day of His judgment and salvation, "will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." The patience and long-suffering of God are great, but there is a time when He will no longer wait for any one. There is a time when the waiting of those who love Him will be over; and when those who are unprepared can no longer keep back the end from those who are ready, when they can no longer expect time for repentance, but must meet their Judge as they are.

Everything, then, is to pass away, and no one knows when or how it will be. How ought we to live, sure as we are that Christ is coming, sure that all this settled order of things is but for a little time, sure that it is only God's long-suffering love that keeps it still going on; sure that, though all things seem so solid and fixed, the Judge is really at the door, only waiting for something we know not of, to make His awful appearance. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?" We, too, who have such hopes, who, though we know that all this wonderful earth

is to pass away, yet know that there is something greater and more beautiful still to come after it, something that now we cannot imagine, and could not understand even if it was shown to us—what manner of persons ought we to be? "Nevertheless," says the Apostle,—that is, Though the heavens are to be dissolved, and the elements to melt with fervent heat—"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." That is all we know. When we live again, if we have lived to God's purpose here, if we have fulfilled that for which He made us, if we have been cleansed from evil and made new creatures in Jesus Christ—when we live again, we shall live where there shall be no more sin, in a world wherein dwelleth righteousness. Therefore, let us wait calmly and quietly, trying to make the best use we can of the waiting time, of the long-suffering and patience of God, who willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Great is our hope, great is our assurance of the end at last. But before the end is come, there lies a great space and gulf about which we know nothing, but that somewhere or other in its unknown days and years the hour of our death will be found. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. . . . Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

XXVII

HOLY COMMUNION

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."—ST. JOHN vi. 51.

IF any one were to ask what is the most sacred, the most solemn, the most consoling part of our religious service—that where God had gathered together most abundantly the greatest of His truths and the richest of His graces—where it is that in our life on earth we are brought nearest to heaven, and are most lifted up in heart and spirit, calmly and awfully to feel the presence of the God whom we serve, I suppose that no well-instructed Christian would doubt how to answer. He would say at once, In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In all the things that concern us as Christians there is nothing like it, but one thing. It stands by itself amid all acts of public and private service, amid all hours of comfort or of awe, amidst the things we tremble at and the things which give us strength and gladness; it stands alone among the things which bring deep, assured joy to those who do their duty, and gives trouble to those who do it not. It stands alone in the strange

mysterious seriousness with which it affects our feelings whenever we have to do with it. It stands alone, with one thing only at all like it, and that thing is death. Nothing, I say, in the whole circle of Christian acts and duties and thoughts comes to our minds surrounded with that strange savour of the other world, as that with which, whether we will or no, we feel ourselves encompassed about in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Death, the real passage into that other world, death which brings us face to face with a state in which this world has ceased to be anything, is the only other thing which brings over our feelings that awful shadow of the everlasting state, which steals over us when we think of this Sacrament; and beneath which we rest while we are engaged in its celebration.

Let us think then of what was before us, what thoughts came across our minds, what blessings were ours, when we were partaking this morning of the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood. What is it that makes it so different from all other acts of prayer and praise? What gives it its matchless solemnity, its matchless savour of heaven, its deep comfort? Why, when we speak of it, does an increased seriousness come over our feelings and words? Why, when we are present at it, are we so impressed; why is it the time of our deepest devotion, why does it seem to spread all round such a holy calm, that nothing earthly must disturb?

There is no wonder that it should be so. It is nothing strange that, of all solemn things that we have to do with, it should be the most solemn. For what of all things that the earth ever saw, in all its

ages, was the most awful? Surely that hour when the Son of God made peace for sinful men by dying for them. And of that most awful instance of what God's love to man can come to, that which we did this morning, is the ever-returning witness and reflection. Ever since the evening before Christ died, this has been done. Up to the last day of men upon this earth, up to the day when Christ comes again to judgment, we know that this will be kept on. And why, but that it is the special message, not in word but in act, of what happened when our pardon and salvation were won. Around the Sacrament of the Holy Communion gathers all the unspeakable mystery and glory and dread, which belongs to the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ; and we feel the influences of that hour, influences which none can resist, even if they are not guided and benefited by them. We feel that the power of the Cross is not yet spent and exhausted, when we listen to the words—"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of Thy tender mercy didst give Thine only Son Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by His one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in His holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that His precious death, until His coming again; Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech Thee; and grant that we receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine, according to Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of His death and passion, may

be partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood."

We feel that in so doing we are brought, in a degree to which nothing else brings us, into having to do, ourselves, with these most awful doings; brought into having a close and intimate participation in what passed at the great Sacrifice; that to us, it is no longer a thing of the past, a thing only thought of in the mind, but that in all its reality and truth, in all its depths of love and of judgment, it has come close to us—as close as if we had been actually present at it on Calvary. Long over, years and years ago, we feel as if it were come back once more. And in truth, though the Sacrifice is over once for all, He who was the Sacrifice is an ever-living, ever-present Lord, our ever-interceding and atoning Priest; and where is He so present, so near, as when in His Church and on His Altar, His dying, His Sacrifice, His making peace by the blood of His Cross, is again and again solemnly rehearsed? What is it that makes us feel this Sacrament so specially awful—all of us, whether we come to receive it or not—all of us, whether we obey Christ's command, or cannot bring ourselves to do so—what is it that makes us shrink, and makes us awe-struck, but the deep persuasion and the lurking fear, that if anywhere Christ is near, is present—if anywhere under the veil which hides heaven from the eye of man, we yet really meet Him, who was once made flesh for us, it is when we come to the Holy Communion? What is it but the belief, so blessed and so full of joy to some, but which is too much for others to bear, that then we "spiritually eat the flesh

of Christ, and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us; then we are one with Christ, and Christ with us;" that then, what is offered us, is no less than this—"that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His body, and our souls washed through His most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us"? What is it but the truth, which unbelief ever vainly struggles against, and, in spite of itself, acknowledges with trembling, that to the faithful the words are not spoken in vain—"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee . . . The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life"?

These are the reasons why this Sacrament is unlike anything else, any other religious service; why it is so awful and yet so dear; why it is the moment of such solemn comfort, and the source of such strength and cleansing, above all other times. Because it is the communication to us of the Death and Passion of Christ, and in it we are carried back, for the time, to that one Sacrifice, in which our own pardon was involved, and from which flowed God's mercy to the world. Because, further, it is the link and bond, while Christians are living in the flesh, between earth and heaven—it is the meeting-place between the redeemed and their Redeemer, out of sight but not far off, the Communion in which we are again and again joined to the risen and glorified Lord, who is the heavenly strength and life by which our spirits live. Therefore, when men come to it with faith and earnestness, it fills them with such peace and joy as nothing else can give. Therefore,

when they have not faith, and will not obey their Master's call, it appears even to them, clothed with the strange, mysterious fear, which, to the sinner, surrounds heaven too, and makes God so terrible in His Holiness, to those who will not love Him.

There is yet another reason why this divine and sacred holiness waits on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is because here we have communion, not only with the Lord, but with the whole Church of Christ. What we did this morning was this morning done, in substance the same, in thousands of Churches throughout the whole world. What we did this morning has never ceased to be done, probably for a single day, since the Lord ascended up into heaven. What we did this morning, the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the wine, with the words used on that last evening, has been done in ways outwardly the most strangely different and opposite; done in the upper chamber, done in the consecrated and hallowed Church; done in the prison under ground, done in the caves and dens of the earth, done in the most glorious buildings raised by the hand of man, done in fear and trembling, by banished outlaws in peril of their lives, done with all the pomp and majesty of worship amid adoring crowds, done with the deepest devotion by the rude barbarians of centuries ago, and yet done with the deepest devotion by the Christians who live in the light and knowledge of the later days. It has been done amid error and corruption, done in the spirit of division as well as in the spirit of love, done so as to be profaned and abused, done so as to be the bringing men nearest from earth to heaven; done in

countless ways, in countless languages, yet never, throughout all ages, among all Christian nations, never ceasing. And amid all differences that surrounded it and were mixed up with it, ever at bottom and in substance it is the same; the same in what it was, the same in the words of Christ, which never ceased to be spoken—"This is My Body—This is My Blood. Do this in remembrance of Me—Drink ye all of this."

In doing this, we do what all our fathers have done; we do what all our children will do, until He come again. We do an act, by which we are brought into communion with the whole Church of Christ, that has been, that is, and that is to be. In this, in this one point, we who never saw each other, are united. Here, we who are so separated, are one. Here, those who are right and those who are wrong, in numberless ways of doctrine and teaching, are brought into agreement by their common feeling of the need and the grace of the Cross of Christ, and of the power of the risen Saviour. Here, we who most deeply sympathise with one another, and we who never could be brought on earth to understand each other, are practically joined in one; for both break the bread and pour the wine, and receive it as the token that the Lord died for them—that the Lord hath pardoned us, that the Lord is nigh. By it He assures us that "we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of His Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people;" by it we are linked together with the whole assembly of the redeemed of Christ; those who are living, and those who have gone before in His faith and fear. In it,

if ever, are St. Paul's words made good, "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

This is indeed what we do when we come to the Holy Communion. If then, you would taste its grace, as your Master meant you to do, you must come with these thoughts about it. It is difficult to imagine any one of common seriousness taking part in it, and not having some of these great truths and feelings found in him; for they are all in the words of the service, and we cannot escape from them. But, my brethren, if you would really have the full blessing of the Holy Communion, you must prepare yourselves for it. If a man cannot prepare as well as he would wish, I would still say to him, Come and do your best. If we would reap, we must sow; if we would enjoy and profit by the blessings of the Holy Sacrament, we must prepare ourselves during the week. And they who grudge the time and trouble to prepare, must lose a great deal both of the benefit and the comfort of it. And I am sure that when we have felt most deeply and fully the sweetness and gladness of that heavenly hour, when we have most realised in it all that our Master has done for us, and how near we are to Him, in spite of this mortal flesh, in spite of our weakness and our sins, it has been when, beforehand, we have thought

seriously of what we were going to do, and have examined ourselves, as people anxious to know what they really are; when we have poured out our souls in humble confession of our sins, and have entered into our chamber and communed with our hearts in silent earnestness and truth.

May God make His Holy Sacrament more and more a blessing to us; may He give us all grace to think of it more rightly; may He incline the hearts of those who neglect it to see what heavenly comfort and grace is offered to them. May He instruct and kindle the hearts of those who draw near to Him, so that they may taste and find it, more and more, that which, whether in heaven or on earth, is the true food and sustenance and life of an immortal spirit.

XXVIII

CAUSING OTHERS TO SIN

"Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"—ST. MATTHEW xviii. 7.

THERE is a sin which very many people think little about, the sin of making others sin. They feel that they are accountable for the sins of their own hands, and tongues, and thoughts; but they forget another great part of their responsibility, their responsibility for what others have done wrong because of them. Their conscience is at ease because they have not been actually the doers of these sins, and because the guilt of them belongs to others. They forget that if they have had a hand in leading those others to do wrong, they have to answer also for what has been done wrong. They think that because the person who has actually done the sin is to be blamed for it, therefore they themselves are free; and because he must bear his burden and undergo his judgment, therefore no one else has any burden to bear in the matter.

It is a common thing, I say, to forget or undervalue the sin of making others sin. And yet, to every one who thinks about the matter, the danger

would almost seem to be that he should frighten himself unreasonably about the share he might have in other men's sins. For we are all so bound up with one another, that a great deal of what every man does, depends on what other people about him think and say and do; and when we consider what our words and deeds may have caused others to do; how, without our knowing it, others have taken our example to encourage themselves in what is wrong; how, by our mistakes, or our carelessness, or our idle talking, we may have sown the seeds of evil in those who looked up to us, and thought they could not be going wrong if they followed in our steps; how much wrong-doing and sin there is in the world which there would not have been if we had always done our own duty, if we had not been selfish, or ill-natured, or slothful, if we had always been perfectly true and sincere and straightforward; when, I say, even a good man, who wishes to follow Christ's Gospel in earnest, thinks how much mischief may have come to pass among people round him without his knowing it at the moment, the danger is that he should be alarmed and disquieted out of measure and reason. But I am not going to dwell on this. God does not send His warnings to ensnare and trouble the honest and good heart, the conscience that is in earnest in keeping the straight way. We can none of us tell all that comes of our words and deeds on others. A great deal of it we cannot help, and we trust Him who is the God of mercy and judgment, not to be extreme in following out all we do into the fruits it may lead to in others. But without searching into secret things which we cannot understand, without

being superstitiously scrupulous and afraid about the distant consequences of what we do, it is yet extremely important to remind ourselves that there is such a sin, and one about which there can be no doubt or mistake, as the sin of making others do wrong. It is a real sin, a common sin, and a very dreadful sin. It was the first sin committed in the world, for it was the sin of the tempter who tempted the woman to disobey God; and it was the first fruit of the Fall of man, for the first thing which the woman did when she had sinned herself was to make the man sin also. It has ever been the great means of keeping sin alive and strong in the world; one generation has taught the next, and handed on its fatal tradition of evil.

Besides all sins, then, that we may commit ourselves for our own pleasure or advantage, out of the wickedness and folly of our own hearts, there is yet this burden, the sin of making others to sin. And this may be in two ways. It may be in the way of direct temptation. I am not speaking of those who tempt others, as the devil tempts men, for the sake of making them do wrong. I am speaking of a sin which is far short of that horrible wickedness, but which yet is a very great sin. I am speaking of people who, when they are doing wrong themselves, do not care about, or see the additional harm and sin, of dragging others into it with them. I am speaking of the delusion that a man can, as it were, keep his part of the sin to himself, and have nothing to do, nothing to answer for, in that part which comes to the share of others. I am speaking of the lightness and thoughtlessness which make people forget

how great an additional load of guilt and punishment they are bringing on their own heads, when, by their enticing, by their influence, by their persuasion, they cause sin to be done which otherwise would not be done, by which the number of sinners is increased on the earth. The truth is, and it is one of the aggravations of sin from which there is no escape, that a great part of the evil that is done in the world necessarily requires as its price and condition this additional sin, the sin of making another sin. A great part of it cannot be done without betraying another soul into condemnation. It cannot be done without taking advantage of the weakness, or the ignorance, or even the sin of our brother, perhaps to make him at last even a greater sinner than ourselves. It is but a small part of the sins which men do, which they can do alone. They require some one to sin with them. And is it not an awful thought that when God comes to visit us, and to call us to account, He will require at our hands not only what we have done ourselves, things that we know, and acknowledge, and are sorry for, but all that sin and wickedness in others, which our own sins have caused; all those transgressions of others, without which our sins could not have been indulged in; all those overthrows of conscience and the sense of right, all those falls from truth and innocence in others, which the devil has made the condition of our having our own evil way?

But the sin of making others sin comes in yet another way than that of direct temptation to others. It comes more subtly and secretly, and in a sense more awfully, because less under our direct control, in the example which others see in us and follow. There

are men who have not much scruple about doing wrong themselves, but who have not so far lost their nobleness and generosity of mind as not to shrink from directly tempting others who are as yet free from guilt. They would think little of the sin in themselves, and not much of the sin in others, who are accustomed to it; but they would have pity on those who had not yet their own evil experience, and would keep back from letting them into their own bad knowledge, and from exposing them to the temptations into which they rush themselves. But though they would not like to bring on their souls the sin of directly tempting others, they forget what judgment they are heaping on themselves, simply by the sin which their example is encouraging all round them. And so it is, more or less, with most of us. We forget what we are doing merely by our example. We forget what wrong things we are sanctioning, not by trying to make others do them, but by letting them see that we do them without check or fear. We forget that the sins which we thus, often from mere thoughtlessness, encourage, are apt to increase tenfold in those who quote us for their warrant and pattern. Many a wrong thing which others round us once shrank from and hesitated to do, they have come to think cannot be so bad because they see us do it. We have, as it were, interpreted and made clear what was doubtful, and we have made it clear in a mischievous, unholy, ungodly sense, while we perhaps were not thinking of what we were doing. The falsehood which we uttered in joke, or which we called a harmless way of getting out of a difficulty, has stuck and taken root in some

one's mind near us, and blossomed into a full-blown way of lying, which he says he learnt from us, and defends by our example. The bad word, the hasty burst of ill-temper, are taken to mean more than they really do, and they make others think little of the wrongfulness of them, they lead *them* to language and to passion which we perhaps should shrink from, but to which we first opened the gate. We did not mean it very likely, but so it is; by our negligence and carelessness, if by nothing worse, we have made our brother to sin. We have dropped the evil seed, and we have strengthened him in wickedness.

And is this a sin to think little about—the sin of making others to sin? Surely it is one which we ought to take account of when we are trying to realise to ourselves what will be the strict and just judgment of God on our heart and life. Put aside, and leave to the mercy of God, all that is doubtful as to the effects which your actions and example may have had around you. But look and see, when what you have done wrong, and know that you have done wrong, is reflected, repeated, acted over again in the sins of those who know you. Then acknowledge to God your share in those sins; then take home to yourself the truth which we are all so slow to believe, that you have to answer for the sin of having made others to sin. I do not say that you have to answer for their sins, but for the sin of having made them to sin—not for their share, but for your share in the evil.

When we have most need to remember this is in our families. Parents and masters need to remember it in what they say and do before those com-

mitted to their care. Children need to remember it in what they say and do one to another. The little child which to-day lies helpless and harmless, knowing neither good nor evil, will, twenty years years hence it may be, have grown up into a strong man, turned away from God and goodness, and be following sin with all his heart. And how will this have come about? Why, but because when he was still little, children a little older than himself took pleasure in teaching him the evil ways, the bad words, the wrong deeds, which they had learned. Why, but because he and they had been accustomed to see and hear what was wrong at home, and they had seen older people think nothing of wicked words, had seen older people careless about truth, careless about their tongues, careless about their prayers; because they had seen older people give way without check to anger and fierceness, and take pleasure in evil speaking; because they had heard them make light of drunkenness and sin. What they saw they copied, what they heard they repeated; and perhaps, starting with a bad example, they have become worse than their example. This is the way in which evil and sin are handed on from generation to generation. Ought it not to make us all afraid lest we should have any part in this evil work?

May God give us grace to remember that what we have to think of is, not only the actual sin which our immediate temptation leads us to, but also the sin which it will cause in others who look up to us, or who are under our charge. It would check our rash tongues, it would cool the fire of temptation, if we would only get ourselves to think that it is difficult for

us to be alone in guilt; that if we sin we can hardly help spreading it—spreading it beyond our power to stop it. May He guard and deliver us by His grace from this bitter punishment of having the sins of our neighbours and friends, the sins of those who are nearest and dearest to us, traced home, by the unerring judgment of God, to our misdeeds.

XXIX

PLEASING NOT OURSELVES BUT OTHERS

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me."—ROMANS xv. 1-3.

ST. PAUL here gives us the rule for our behaviour to one another in the common every-day concerns of life. He is not talking here so much of the greater and more pressing occasions of serving and helping one another; of the more serious and special acts of mercy and charity and patience which we are bound to show to those whom Christ has made His brethren and our own. St. Paul is hardly talking here of feeding the hungry, succouring the distressed, comforting the afflicted, waiting on the sick, teaching the ignorant, bringing back the sinner. But he is speaking of what is almost of as great importance. He is speaking of our behaviour to one another as we live together and converse with one another, and have to do with one another in the every-day concerns of life; in the hundreds and thousands of little matters that rise up between us all as we are joined together

in families, or as acquaintances, or in employments. He is speaking of our way of going on to one another, as fathers and mothers and children, as brothers and sisters, as neighbours and friends, as masters and servants; of the way we guide our words and deeds to those whom we meet with continually, day after day. It is for this part of our life that St. Paul is here laying down the principle and the example which we ought to follow.

I said just now, the *little matters* that rise up in our daily intercourse with one another. We call them little matters, and, taken one by one, they are so perhaps. But they are not at all little or of small consequence when taken all together. For, in fact, what is our whole life made up of, but of these little matters? It is made up of days, and days are made up of hours and minutes, and every one of these hours and minutes is taken up with something or other, and for the most part these somethings are what we call the little matters of life. We are at our meals, or at our work, or we are chatting with people near us, or we are walking, or reading, or taking our pleasure—small things in themselves, but they fill up our hours and days. So our hours and days, and therefore our whole life, will be of such a sort as these small passing matters are, which go on with us from hour to hour. If they are such as are fit for a Christian, our whole life will be a Christian's life; if they are contrary to Christ's spirit and will, our whole life will be one which goes against Christ, and displeases and offends Him. Great and serious actions and events do not make up our lives: it is not every day that we have an opportunity of help-

ing some neighbour in trouble, or of bearing some great trial well, or of showing our patience in suffering. These things come only now and then, but our ordinary way of behaving to one another, our ordinary way of speaking to one another, or of feeling to one another, never stops, it goes on all day long, and from day to day, and from week to week. And the truth is, that what a man is, is much more shown in his common words and doings than in his uncommon and seldom ones, and therefore it is these common words and doings which are, if anything, of even more importance than what we call greater occasions. It may chance that a person who is peevish and ill-natured to people about him, may be greatly touched by some case of distress, and may even put himself to great trouble and inconvenience to relieve it. It is a good thing that he should do so; perhaps he may look on it as a proof of his ready sense of duty, of his love to Christ; perhaps he gives little thought to the peevishness and ill-nature which prevail generally in what he says and does, but I greatly doubt whether this continual bad temper which is showing itself in the small events of life, is not a much more serious matter in Christ's eyes than any one service, however apparently great—a much more serious matter *against* the man, than his particular great act of kindness is *for* him.

The rule which St. Paul gives us for this very important part of our life for our ordinary behaviour to one another is, "not to please ourselves," but "let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good to edification." And the example and model which he sets before us, is our Master Christ Himself.

"For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me."

This then is the Christian rule, the Christian rule not for great occasions, but for ordinary and common life; the rule not for once in a way, when something uncommon calls on us, but the rule for all day long, for about the house, and in the room with others; the rule not merely for what we do to others, but for what we say to them, and not merely for what we say to them, but for the way of saying it; the rule against any vexing of others, not by word only, but by look and manner, and unkind tone of voice, or unkind holding our tongue. Alas! who can tell the unkindness, and uncharitableness, and selfishness, which is spread over the whole of our lives, in our every-day going out and coming in, in the short speeches, even in the short "yes" and "no," which pass between us, which wound, and sting, and provoke, without our caring or troubling ourselves about it. It is here that the Apostle comes in with his voice of warning and love, bidding us not to seek to please ourselves, reminding us that Christ has bound us, by law and by example, not merely to help our neighbour, not merely to seek his good and do him service when he needs our assistance, but in all that is for his good to please him. We are not to keep our charity, our kindness, our readiness to put ourselves to trouble, only for great occasions. These are but a small part of the life of any of us, and Christ never meant that they alone were to manifest our love and faith, and the rest of our life, which is spent in the small common concerns and conversa-

tion of the day, to go on without them ; that, so that we were kind and helpful when there was a case of distress or affliction, we might be as harsh, and rough, and sharp, as we chose, as careless of what hurt other people's feelings and gave them pain, as we liked, when there was nothing but the usual course of our life going on. Here also, as well as on great and solemn occasions, we were to take care that we did not show ourselves selfish ; here also we were to be ready to give up our pleasure to please others ; here also we were to think of what others would like, of what would vex and hurt them, of what would do them harm, and lead them wrong, as well as in the most plainly important matters which we can have to deal with.

Such is St. Paul's rule ; the rule of taking thought for the feelings and wishes and comfort of others, when they are at work, or at play with us, when we are talking together to pass the time, when we live with them and they come in our way every hour—the rule of putting ourselves in their place, and considering how such and such a way of speaking, how such and such a look, or tone of voice, will affect them ; the rule of giving up what we might lawfully do ourselves, because perhaps they do not understand it, or it annoys or distresses them ; the rule of keeping a watch over words and speech, in common matters of conversation, in which, trifling as they are, so often a hasty word will bring up unkindness, or put men out of humour, or even rise up into a quarrel ; the rule of trying to remember always, whoever is before us, whether brother or sister, or parent or child, or master or servant, or neighbour or friend,

that we are bound to them, bound to them at this very moment, by our Master's law of love, bound to think not merely of their good, but if it is possible, also of their wishes and feelings; bound to think not only of what we choose or have a right to say and do in their behalf, but of what it is fair and kind and useful for them, for us to say and do. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good, to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me."

What a different rule is this from that of the world. How different are these sayings of the Bible from what are so generally heard, not only in the common intercourse of life, but in its most serious concerns, and which pass current especially in the every-day conversations which we hear. "Why should I care about what so and so likes?" "Why may I not say what I think? If he does not like it, it is no business of mine to find out what he likes." "Why should I give way to him? What business has he to be hurt or vexed?" "Why should I take trouble to get on with him and please him?" "Why should I put up with his unpleasant, disagreeable manner?" These are the common sayings of the world. The sayings of the world bid us please ourselves, and show our dislike of what does not please us. They bid us consider ourselves as our own masters, to speak and behave as we please, without any one having a right to call us to account. They bid us be kind and friendly to those we like, and to change our countenance and words

and behaviour to those we do not like. They teach us to pretend to be kind and friendly where we do not feel it, but where it is unsafe for us to show it. They tell us that there is no harm in putting ourselves always first—our own wishes, our own credit, our own pleasure. They tell us that it is sufficient to be well-behaved in company, but that we may be as ill-natured, sulky, bad-tempered, as we choose at home. They tell us that it is our own affair if we choose to speak crossly and sharply to those with whom we live, and to vex and hurt them by our frowns, or our fretfulness, or our angry answers. This is what the rules of the world tell us; and they are the excuses which rise up in our minds, when we are choosing our own pleasure against that of others, or annoying and grieving them by our bad tempers and cross words:—"Why may I not do what I like? Why should I seek to please other people instead of myself?" The world teaches us to dwell most on what others owe us, not on what we owe them; to stand on our independence, to resist the supposed claims which may be made on our forbearance, or our willingness to give way, or our good temper; to expect others to be careful about hurting our feelings, rather than to be careful ourselves about hurting theirs. And I am afraid, that we are much more ready to think and act with the world in this matter, than with St. Paul, and with St. Paul's Master; to please ourselves in the first place, and not to think very much of pleasing others at all; but certainly to look on it as something beyond what any one could expect, something not to be thought of, to please them by giving up what we like ourselves.

There is hardly a better test of whether a man is, in his secret heart, trying to serve Christ with all his strength, than his steady effort not to think first of what pleases himself, but of what pleases his neighbour, in the small daily concerns of life. I say in the small daily concerns of life, for indeed it is in these that the difficulty is greatest, of trying to please our neighbour to his good. It is easier to please him, easier to give up our own pleasure, in some one particular thing, once for all, than continually, day after day, in the common course of things as they chance to turn up. It is easier to do a great act of kindness than to do it *graciously;* to do it considering the feelings of the person who is to receive it; to do it, thinking not of our own kindness who do it, but of the wants and wishes, and perhaps fancies, of him for whom it is done. It is easier to give up something on which we have set our heart, in order to render a kind and charitable service, than it is to go through with the service, when we have begun it, cheerfully and heartily, wishing to please him whom we are helping. Many men could do the one who would fail in the other. Many men, after having begun the act of kindness, would find the single separate instances of having to bear with another's ways, and to give up their wishes and pleasures to another, day after day, often in mere trifles, too heavy a burden for their faith and their love of Christ. And so, many would be willing to take a great deal of trouble, to make some one heavy sacrifice for the sake of some one in distress, who yet could not gain such a conquest over self as to be able to bear his infirmities and bad tempers. They could deny themselves com-

forts for his sake; but if they had to live with him, their temper could not give way to his, they could make no allowance for his trials and weakness, they could have no patience with his complaints, his fretfulness, perhaps his follies; they would be provoked by finding in him feelings and wishes different from their own. Surely nothing shows the heart mortified from the world, and indeed given up to God, more than the cheerful, gentle, constant endeavour, to make the pleasure of others round us *our* pleasure; nothing shows it more than the honest attempt to bear with good heart and hope, the infirmities and faults of those with whom God has bound up our lot, and not to let our own faults provoke them, and make their path more difficult and more troublesome. Nothing shows it more than the endeavour to be all day long looking out, not for what will please ourselves, but for what will please those with whom we have to speak, and to work, and to live; whether they be strong or weak, good-tempered or cross, sensible or foolish, patient or impatient; to seek what will please them for their good, and, in pleasing them, will please God and Christ.

Even in this, as you see, Christ has given us an example. Even in the common round of every-day work and company, He has deigned to join us, showing us how to copy His love, and show forth His heavenly spirit. "For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee, fell on me." Is there anything which we can less bear than to be charged with faults that are not our own? Yet Christ bore even this. Christ took to Himself patiently the

reproaches which did not belong to Him; "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." My brethren, let us take His blessed example with us, and keep it before our mind and in our hearts, when we have to deal with one another. We shall sometimes hear sharp speeches; then let us think of Christ and be patient. We shall sometimes find others cross our wishes; let us think of Christ not doing His own pleasure, and if it is lawful, let us even help them in their wishes. We shall sometimes not feel inclined to help our brethren in those small trifling matters which, small as they are, make all the difference to life going on smoothly or roughly; we shall sometimes ask ourselves, why our pleasure, our convenience, should not be put above theirs—why they should not suit our tempers, and not expect ours to suit theirs. When these thoughts come up, let us cast our eyes back to our Master, Christ. Let us feel what a shame it is for Christians, Christian men and women, Christian children, to be cross, ill-natured, selfish, towards one another, in even the small things of every-day life, when He who was so perfect put up with so much imperfection; He who was so wise, bore with and was considerate to so much folly; He who was sinless, welcomed sinners and gave them time to mend. Let us remember how tender, how compassionate, how full of care for those round Him, how ready to make allowances, was the Master whose Name we bear. Let us in word, and look, and voice, try to bear one another's burdens, instead of making those of others heavier. Let us not be afraid of denying ourselves.

In time we shall reap the blessed fruit of such self-denial, in the enlargement of our love and the strengthening of our faith. And with the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts, we shall find that it is not so hard and unpleasant a thing to give up pleasing ourselves, in order to please our neighbour to his good.

XXX

COMMON PRAYER

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven."—St. Matthew xviii. 19.

If Christ has promised that our heavenly Father will hear the joint prayer of any two of His disciples, much more may we expect that He will hear the prayers of a large number of them, agreeing to ask something in His Name. If the agreement in prayer, of two or three, is looked upon with such favour, much more the agreement of His disciples as a body, when they meet together as one body—as the body of which He is the Head, not merely as so many separate individuals, but publicly and solemnly, as His Church. And here is the warrant and obligation of common prayer.

I will this afternoon say a few words about Common Prayer. Three questions arise about it: 1. Why should there be Common Prayer? 2. How is it to be done, and to be best done? 3. How ought we to take our part in it?

Open your Prayer Book at the title page, and you will see that the book is called, the Book of Common Prayer, and of other things besides. It is

the book of various services, and of the administration of the Sacraments; but the main part of it is taken up, as its name tells us, with common prayer.

Common Prayer—that is, prayer in common, joint prayer, prayer all together, the prayer of Christians as one body. There are other sorts of prayers too—there is private prayer, there is household family prayer, there may be the prayer of a certain number of friends met together. But all these are different from common prayer, which is the prayer of the whole Church, in its public place of worship. We say our private prayers in our chambers; we say our family prayers at home in our own houses; in Church, we assemble together to pray as one body, as one parish, as one portion of Christ's universal Church. This is common prayer—in which we join with others, not because they are our friends, or members of our household, but because they are Christians; in which we join with all who profess Christ's name, whether we know them or not, whether they are neighbours or strangers, because we are all supposed to share alike in being of God's family and household, and have the same needs, the same hopes, the same promises, in common.

1. In the first place, why should there be Common Prayer? Why should not private prayer, by ourselves and for ourselves, be enough?

To begin with, because it is God's will that there should be common prayer. Ever since there was a people of His own, there has been common worship—a common altar, a tabernacle, or temple, or synagogue, where all who belonged to Him were expected to

meet and join in public service to Him. The Old Testament is full of memorials of the public worship and common prayer and praise of the Jews, before Christ came with His greater promises. Half, I suppose, of the book of Psalms was composed for their common worship. And in the New Testament there is the same proof that God desired His Church to meet in common prayer and praise, and that they did so; and when any person showed a disposition to neglect it, they were rebuked by His Apostles—"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is."

But besides that it is God's will there is a plain reason for it. The reason is that God looks upon us, and deals with us, not merely one by one as individuals, but jointly and in common as one body. He does so in all things; and so in the matter of prayer too. He blesses and He chastens us as individuals, and He blesses and chastens us as one body. We may offend and please Him as individuals; and, besides what we do separately, we may offend and please Him as one body, in things for which no one more than another, but all, one with another, have their share of responsibility. He speaks to us as individuals, and He speaks to us as one body, not as separate disciples, but as all together making up His Church. As St. Paul says, "As we have many members in one body . . . so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." And again, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." As, then, we must pray each for himself as separate members of Christ, so we must pray all together as

one body, and for the one body. As we have to pray each for his own particular wants and necessities, so we have to make common prayer for the wants of the whole body of the Church. And more than this. It is not only a matter of duty, but one of special expectation and promise. For if God will hear the prayer of faith from one believer, much more will He hear the joint prayers of the united faith of many, met together in His name, and appealing to His promise. If we may hope for the blessings of prayer when we pray by ourselves, much more may we hope for them—hope both for our own special petitions, the pardon and overcoming of our sins, a full share of grace, a larger partaking of God's mercies, and also for mercies and blessings to the whole body with which we are bound up—when we mingle our prayers with theirs, when we join our faith to the faith of the whole Church, and throw ourselves into the common hopes and desires of all, and claim for ourselves and our fellow-worshippers that promise which Christ made to the agreeing together even of only two.

2. Next, how is Common Prayer to be done? and how had it best be done?

It may be done in several ways. It may be done by all together uniting their voices in the same prayers, and saying them all together. Or it may be done by one of the congregation alone, speaking in the name of all.

Again, the prayers may be agreed upon beforehand, and be prayers which every one knows the words of, and what they will ask for. Or the prayers may be what are called *extempore*, made

each time differently by one person speaking of his own mind, and saying what comes into his own thoughts. This last has this advantage, that if there is anything special or occasional in which we feel deeply interested, it can be more easily brought into the prayers offered in common. But it has also great disadvantages. First, that the congregation cannot tell beforehand what the *extempore* prayer is going to be about, and so they are obliged to listen to it as they would listen to any speech, or as they listen to the sermon, to know what will be said; so that, in fact, they are in danger of merely listening where they ought to be doing something very different, namely, praying with their whole hearts. That is one disadvantage; that when I leave it to another person to pray out of his own mind for me, I cannot tell what subject he will choose to pray about, and what words he may put, as it were, in my mouth, who am to say "Amen" to him. And when you consider, in the second place, how careful we ought to be in our words solemnly addressed to Almighty God, and how few persons there are who could be trusted to think, while speaking on the spur of the moment, of the right things to say for the rest of the congregation, and the right words to say them in—when you think how easily people may fall into careless or unworthy ways of speaking to Almighty God, when they have to do it in public before other people out of their own mind, the disadvantages of this, for a general rule and method of common prayer, greatly outweigh the occasional convenience. And do not let any one think it is more spiritual. The spiritualness of prayer is not in the

words of him who prays, but in the heart of him who follows the prayer. He who cannot pray spiritually and heartily from the well-known and well-chosen words of a book, will not pray more spiritually because he is listening to an *extempore* prayer. He may be more excited, or as he thinks, more moved and warmed; but it does not in the least follow that he is in a more spiritual state. New, and strange, and fine words may excite and move us: they often excite us so much that we forget that a humble and contrite heart is the first thing necessary in prayer.

There are times when it is the natural thing to pour out our desires and feelings in prayer that rises fresh to our lips for the moment—in *extempore*, unprepared prayer. But these are not the times of regular, stated, public worship as they come Sunday after Sunday in God's house. *Extempore* prayer is for extraordinary occasions, and these Sunday services are ordinary ones—one much like another—with nothing special to call for it. For such common prayer it is far better that people should know the words of their prayers and be familiar with them; that they should not be distracting their attention by asking themselves what sort of things the minister will pray for, and how he will frame his words; but that—knowing the words—their thoughts should be fixed on the things to be prayed for. That is the reason why we think it so much wiser, and better, and more sober, and not only this, but really more spiritual to pray out of a book, because then we may be sure of having the most beautiful and most spiritual words to pray in—

words in which the faith, and hope, and petitions of generations of holy souls before us have gone up to God—prayers fittingly chosen for us by men who were themselves deeply filled with the Spirit of God. And so, not having to trouble about the words, our hearts are more free to think of their own needs, and are more prepared to express them in words which equally suit the wants of their brethren too. And in this way we best secure the consent and union of all in the common prayers. When all have agreed beforehand to use the same words, it is more easy for them when they come together to agree in reality to ask the same thing.

But again, should Common Prayer be said by all togethèr, or by one in the name of all?

You will observe that when prayer is *extempore* the congregation cannot join in it, except by listening to it and by their "Amen" at the end. And this is another great objection to conducting common prayer in this way. For why should not the congregation join in voice as well as in mind in the common prayer that goes up from the Church for all? If they can join in it without confusion, without causing disorder, why should they not? The only reason I can see why the whole service should not be joined in by the whole congregation is this—that certain pauses and rests, where the prayers of all are taken up for a while by one, help to do two things; they enable the petitions of the congregation to be more clearly, as it were, brought to a point, and summed up in short, plain, strong words; and, in the next place, they enable each person to retire for a while into himself, even though

in public, to collect his thoughts and fix them with less distraction on the great things which common prayer is for—to withdraw for a while from the joint sound of other voices and the presence of others round him, to follow only one voice, speaking in the name not only of the congregation as a body, but of each individual in it. The best way of common prayer would seem to be where both ways should be used; where the congregation should largely join in it, but where part of it should be said by one in the name of the rest; where there should be changes and rests, and each should take his share, and all should help, and answer to, and encourage one another in doing honour to their heavenly Father.

That is the way in which our Book of Common Prayer is drawn up. Part of it is for the congregation, and part for the minister. Part of it each says separately, in part of it they join in together. In the confession of sins with which we begin our common prayer, priest and people say the same words together, and join in humbling themselves in the most solemn way before God's throne of mercy. In the Psalms they answer one another—one reads one verse, and the other meets him, as it were, by taking up the next. In the Litany, the minister leads by setting before the congregation certain things to be delivered from, certain mercies to be asked for; and they finish his sentences, and almost take the words out of his mouth, by their response—"Good Lord, deliver us." "We beseech thee to hear us, Good Lord." Then, when they have joined together in so much of the common prayer; when together

they have confessed their sins, together or alternately sent up their praises to God, together asked for deliverance and mercy from the worst of evils and for the greatest of blessings, the minister takes up the rest of the service by himself, gathering up once more into short collects, as they are called, the principal subjects of common prayer—peace, preservation from evil, grace and help for our rulers, light and guidance for bishops and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, God's goodness to be shown to all sorts and conditions of men, thanksgivings for His goodness in nature and in redemption—beginning always with a collect which (unlike these which never change) changes from week to week, and contains some prayer appropriate to the season, or suggested by some special Christian thought or hope. But in these the congregation are still supposed to take their part. They do not, indeed, join their voices with the minister, but they are supposed to join with their attention and with their prayers from the heart. And knowing beforehand what he is going to pray for, they can follow with no less earnestness than if they said the words with him. And at the end of each prayer, their "Amen" is the token that they take the words to themselves, that they desire to have their own part in them, that they make the words of the speaker the common prayer of all of whom he is the spokesman and mouthpiece.

3. How then ought we to take our part in Common Prayer?—I will put it in this way.

You often hear complaints made — I daresay sometimes not unjustly—against clergymen, for the way in which they perform the service. They are

careless and irreverent—or they are too ceremonious and formal—they read too fast and cannot be heard, or too slow, and as if they do not think of what they are reading—or they are pompous, or affected, or drawling. And people who hear them are very much offended, and make no scruple about saying so, fairly sometimes and sometimes utterly unfairly. But however this may be, it is felt to be a reason for complaining and saying strong things. The service of God is badly conducted, the reverence and honour due to Him is not paid, and one of the most solemn things in which we can engage is lowered by the fault or carelessness of those to whom it is committed. Now, no one has a right to complain of people finding fault with them. The shame of disgracing and dishonouring the common prayer of the Church is indeed great, when it rests with the clergyman. But now I want you to look at the other side of the matter. The clergyman is not the only person on whom it rests to conduct properly the common prayer of God's House. It rests with the congregation also. And what if the congregation do not do their part? You judge the clergyman strictly and severely if he does not do his part—not too strictly and severely if you judge justly. But if it is a sin and a shame in the clergyman to be, in his part of the common prayer, careless, remiss, slothful, inattentive, is it none in those who make up the congregation? If you would be shocked at the clergyman behaving himself unseemly in the House of God, have *you* nothing to do with the service, that you may take liberties with the honour of His House? If you would be justly disgusted at the clergyman for not taking

the trouble to read correctly, has your conscience nothing to say to you, if you do your part in a way that you know you ought not? I say nothing of positive ill-behaviour in Church—that is quite a different matter and to be spoken of in a different way. But I am speaking of what the congregation does to keep up the reverent, careful, fitting performance of common prayer—of the part which they have to take in it. And I put it to your reason and good sense; why is it less a shame to the congregation to give an unbecoming character to the service, than it is to the clergyman? The service is really for you—for you the people; why is it less a shame for you to neglect your part than for him to neglect his? Of course you are as much interested in the prayers as he is. Why, then, is a cold, unbecoming service, dead, or silent, or irreverent, where the congregation will not do their part in it, less a reproach to you than you yourselves make it to a clergyman, when you think that he is in fault in these matters? True, the clergyman is one, and the congregation are many—but the many may do wrong as well as the one. Each single person may feel sheltered, for the time, under the many; but he must take his share in what the many do wrong, if he is willing to go along with them.

I know that all cannot join in all the parts, but all can join in some. All can join their voices in the "Amen," which makes the prayer said by another our own prayer. All can join in ascribing "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost" when it comes in the service. All can join in answering to the solemn prayers in the Litany—

most solemn, yet most plain ; asking for things that all can understand, and for deliverance from evils of which all know the names—" Good Lord, deliver us." All can join in the Lord's Prayer—all can join in the Belief. All can do so much. And only think what the sound of united voices would do to make our common prayer sound indeed the voice of one body of Christians praying to and praising God. And many can do more—many can answer the verses in the Psalms ; and if all did so who could, it would be indeed the voice of supplication and thanksgiving going up for the whole congregation, and their public agreement in ascribing honour to their Lord and King. That is what common prayer ought to be ; and whoever hinders it by any fault, whether clergyman or congregation, is doing dishonour to God in taking that awful and holy Name in vain. May that never be said of us. Let us do our part as well as we are able, to encourage and provoke one another to a hearty and warm display of our care for God's service. Let us not be afraid to hear our own voices in the House of God. Remember that every one who is not afraid to join in the responses is helping those round him to do so also. Let us fear as our heaviest reproach the reproach of deadness, slackness, carelessness, irreverence in our services. The more we join, the more we shall feel the pleasure and the good of joining. So shall we realise those glorious descriptions of worship which we read of in the Bible, and realise with them the transport and gladness with which they can fill our minds. So shall we hear and receive the summons to all, high and low, to come joyfully, without fear or shame, before

their Father's presence, and to join in the songs of heaven. "Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great." "Young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the Name of the Lord; for His Name only is excellent, and His praise above heaven and earth."

XXXI

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

"That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."—EPHESIANS iii. 17-19.

I HARDLY know anything more disheartening than to read such a passage as this, and to feel while we read it how little our own hearts and thoughts answer to it. We see how St. Paul felt and thought. The words come glowing from his soul; he is lifted up above himself with the greatness, the inconceivable greatness, of the things he is talking of. His inward eye is fixed on the love of Christ to the world—on the wonderfulness of God's counsels to men—on the height and depth, and length and breadth, which no one can measure, of what had just been made known of God's feelings about them, and of His purposes towards them. And from the fulness of his heart his mouth speaks. We see that he is overflowing with the feelings produced by the contemplation of what Christ is and has done. His whole mind is alive to it. He speaks not by custom, or because it is right to magnify the Lord's greatness, but because he cannot help it—he cannot restrain what he feels and thinks.

And how differently do we read the words. There they are before us—words of fire and life, words which show that to him who spoke them the love of Christ was the most real, the nearest, the most absorbing thought in the world. Christ is not less to us than He was to St. Paul. But how often must we confess to ourselves that we have no feelings which answer to the Apostle's manner of speaking; we cannot repeat them as the natural and unforced expression of our own feelings. There seems such a gulf between what we ought to feel and what we do feel—such a difference between the way in which the Gospel appeared to St. Paul and the way in which it appears to us. He found no difficulty in speaking worthily of his Master's love; he passed from the outer scenes of ordinary life to the contemplation of Christ, and straightway his heart began to kindle and his tongue to speak. But we seem only able to touch, as it were, the outside shell of his words. We see, but do not feel, how excellent they are. They are such a contrast to the common thoughts of our life, they are so far above us, that we cannot enter into them.

I think that if we are honest we shall, most of us, confess that it is with some such feelings that we hear such a passage as this. We do not exactly know what to do with it, or how to apply it and get instruction out of it. We listen with a kind of awful respect to the Apostle's rapturous words of love and admiration, but we feel that they are a long way off from our own power of realising what the Bible tells us—a long way off from our natural and ordinary ways of feeling and speaking.

~~And yet~~ what is it that so raises the Apostle's soul and gives him a tongue of fire? It is nothing that is beyond the feelings and sympathy of man. It is no mystery which only a few can penetrate, and which is not for the many. It is the "Love of Christ which passeth knowledge." We can understand what love means. All can understand being touched and melted by love. True, he calls the "Love of Christ" one that passeth knowledge—one so great and astonishing that no thought of man can embrace it in its fulness or sound it in its depths. But though its unsearchableness adds to its wonder, it does not prevent us from understanding that it is love, love shown to us and felt for us in a way which was never shown before. This is what St. Paul is talking of—this is what sets his soul on fire. Any one can understand a person being carried away by sympathy and admiration at the contemplation of some glorious deed. We all know how we feel when we see some noble soul putting aside all thought of self and sparing nothing, perhaps not even life itself, to be of use to others in their need. We know how when we read of such things even in stories, our eyes fill with tears and our hearts are moved; and, perhaps for the moment, we seem carried away with the wish to be like those we are reading of. It is no wonder that any one is moved by such displays of love. And it was such love that St. Paul is speaking of. It was the sight and thought of such love that so carried him away, and gave life and fire to his words.

And we have the same knowledge that he had of that "Love of Christ which passeth knowledge." We

have before us continually, in one form after another, that picture of Christ loving man, which moved St. Paul so deeply. We have that history of love ever open before us, to which nothing done by man for man can compare. There have been men like ourselves, who have lived—as far as man can live—only for their fellow-men; who have spent their lives in ministering to their good; who have taught them, and fed them, and healed them, and comforted them; who have spent this world's riches in providing—not for their own pleasure, but for the welfare of numbers who would never know or thank them; men who have left home and kindred, to toil in the hardest and weariest way, among the lost and the unthankful. And there have been women who have left ease and comfort, and all the tenderness in which they were nurtured, to attend on the sick, to minister to the forsaken and friendless sinner, to spend days of labour and sleepless nights in hospitals. We know what love means in these. But there was One, greater than they, who did more than any of them; who fed the hungry, and healed the sick, and taught the ignorant, and called back the wanderers, and was gentle and merciful to the sinners and the forsaken, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister; all whose life was one endless display of love without stint, love careless of self, love doing its heavenly work without thanks, without return, without comfort. We hear sometimes of men, in their generous love to others, giving up what was their own, contenting themselves with a lower place, throwing up advantages, and coming down from a worldly position, in order to do more good to their

fellows. But who among men came down as Christ did? Who among men gave up what He did, that He might cast in His lot with us? Who among men has *that* to throw away, for the good of his fellows, which Christ surrendered, when the Lord of the worlds became for us a little child, born in the lowest rank of life, born to poverty and neglect, without even "where to lay His head"?

We can admire in man the nobleness and patience which can endure trouble without complaining; which can bear hard words and unkind thoughts from those for whom he is giving up his own ease; which is not easily provoked, whose kindness is not tired out at the ill return it meets with. But who, among men, was ever tried by the contradiction of those for whose sake He lived, as He who came to save us? Who ever, being what He was, and doing what He did, bore so much, and bore it so meekly and enduringly, for the love of those who, for His very goodness, hated Him, and for His very gentleness and humbleness, despised Him? Is there anything that tries a man's love of a cause more than having to lose his character for its sake? Is there anything that tries his love for his friend or neighbour more than having to hold his peace, and sit still under a false accusation, in order to do him service? And have we anything among men like the unselfish love of Him, who being perfect and sinless goodness, was willing for our sakes to be reckoned a sinner and the companion of sinners; who went on doing His works of mercy, when those for whom they were done set them down as done by the devil's help, and for the devil's service; who willingly accepted the character

of a detected impostor for our sakes, when He might, with a word, have put His enemies to confusion; who feared no shame, and refused no reproach, and was content with the company of the most despised of men, and to be reckoned among the transgressors Himself? We talk of men dying for others—no stories touch us more deeply than those of men who have willingly given up their lives for the sake of their fellow-men. And do we not know assuredly, that the Greatest and the Highest died for us, even as a man lays down his life for his friends; that the most beautiful and excellent life that ever was seen in this world, was willingly given up—given up to all that can add to the bitterness and shame of death, and put an end to amid insult and torment—for the sake of us whom He loved? And that love was not put an end to by death. He loved us before dying and in dying: and when death was over He loved us still. We know that He watches over us with the deeper love, now that He is risen, because He once loved us enough to die for us.

All this we know—and St. Paul knew no more. And yet what a different thing was this love to him and to us. Is it possible for us ever to realise it as he did; ever to have the feelings towards it which in him stirred up the depths of his soul, and burst out as naturally from his lips as water does from a spring? And if it is possible—and who can doubt it—why is it that St. Paul's strong words seem to us so strange, so hopelessly above us?

One reason is that we think so little about it. We hear, and read, and talk, but we do not think. When we hear of our Lord's wonderful doings, we

do not take the thought away with us and consider about it, consider what it means and what it comes to. We never turn it about in our minds as we do the ways and doings of men among whom we live. I will venture to say that every one of us during the past week has turned about in his mind some person's character with whom he has had to do, some proceeding of his neighbour's, some transaction that is going on at the present moment; that he has kept it in mind, dwelt with interest on it, looked at it in different ways, and tried to form an opinion on it. And I will venture to say also that there are very few of us who, during the same time, have thought with the same attention and interest about any part of what is told us in the Bible about Jesus Christ. We have not tried to do it with the same real wish to make the thing out, and to bring it plainly before our minds. And thus it is that that wonderful history of "Love . . . which passeth knowledge" becomes so shadowy and dim to our feelings, while we feel so keenly and really, love or dislike, admiration or contempt, for the people and the things all round us. We are alive to them; we allow ourselves to be asleep and dead to the history of the love of Christ.

But above everything, if we would understand and feel our Master's love, we must have something of His Spirit. Most truly is it said that love is the key and interpreter of love. It is difficult to sympathise with and to enter into it if we are unlike it in our heart and mind. We may for a while be charmed and overcome by some great display of nobleness and unselfishness; we may for a moment be lifted

up by the admiration of it, and the wish to be like it, when we read of a man clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, tending the sick, risking his life in pestilence or shipwreck for his fellow-men. But these feelings will pass away, unless we are in reality, and not only in the moment of excitement, like those we admire. They will pass away and leave us dull, and dry, and cold, to what calls upon our love. The story of Christ's love is too old, and too well known, and too familiar, ever to make an impression on us now, unless we have it in our hearts to wish to have something of His love in us. It is too old, too often talked about, to make an impression on us if we are selfish, or unwilling to make sacrifices for others, or if we cherish angry, ill-natured, unkind feelings. No love to Christ, no understanding of His love, can ever come where such feelings fill our hearts. Where these are, the words in which the Bible speaks of His love to us, must seem simply extravagant.

We cannot *make* ourselves love Christ any more than we can *make* ourselves love anybody. But we can keep from that which we know is opposite to that love of one another, about which He has said so much. We can, if we choose, keep down our inclination to ill-nature and unkindness. We can drive away our sloth and carelessness about what is good for our neighbour, and can abstain from indulging our selfishness at his expense. And so, though we cannot make ourselves love our Master, we can at least leave some room in our souls for love to grow. The love of God will grow if we will try to get rid of the love of evil things. And surely

God, who has put into our hearts the seeds of the love of all that is excellent, and beautiful, and true, has also put into them the seeds of the love of Jesus Christ. And He will not only do this, but will make these seeds to grow, if we will but let Him. If we would know the love of Christ, let us try whether doing things something like what He did will not help us both to understand and to feel it.

It is possible, even in our days, to know that "Love of Christ which passeth knowledge." Our life can be nothing without it. We have no other guiding star. We shall live but for disappointment, and die without hope, unless we know it. Oh, may our blessed Master, whose Spirit is even now moving in our hearts, give us more and more to see and realise that vision of love which blesses the soul of man—and not only blesses it, but changes it from earthly to heavenly! May He reveal to us that which is the chief secret and wonder of His Gospel! May He give us grace so to read and think of what we have been told of Jesus Christ, that we may see in Him more and more what is the marvel and excellence which has drawn to Him the hearts of men—of sinner and saint alike—namely, His great and unchanging love!

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

XXXII

THE TRUTH AND JUSTICE OF GOD

"O house of Israel, are not My ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God."—EZEKIEL xviii. 29, 30.

"THE law," we are told by St. Paul, "was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." That is, the old Dispensation of Moses and the Prophets, under which the Jews lived, was to be a gradual preparation and training of men's souls and thoughts, for the fulness of light and truth in Jesus Christ. The Bible is the history of religion from the first, and of the different steps in its course. At first the light was dim and imperfect; by degrees it became greater, and went on increasing to the perfect day. The souls of men at the beginning could not have understood, could not have borne all that Jesus Christ had in time to tell them. Children cannot take in or understand everything at once. They must be taught step by step, little by little, one thing at a time; and as they go on, higher and harder lessons are given them, and all their knowledge opens out and blossoms like a flower gradually opening out from the bud. And so it was when God was teaching His truth to the world. It

was not all revealed at once. It was given to the generations of men, one after another, as they were able to bear it; and this we can see and trace in the different books of the Bible. As much of truth is not told to the Patriarchs in Genesis as is afterwards revealed to Moses. And as much of truth was not given to the Israelites under Moses as was afterwards laid open to them when David wrote the Psalms. And when we come to the Prophets we see in them how the dawn of Gospel truth goes on brightening, how the promises become more clear, and precise, and remarkable; we begin to see glimpses of the great Gospel doctrines, and outlines of the Person and work of Jesus Christ; the religion of outward law and of hopes only in this world is more and more falling into the shade, and giving place to the religion of the heart and spirit, and of hopes that reach beyond this life to the true kingdom of God.

In this gradual opening of truth in the Old Testament, the book of the prophet Ezekiel has a very striking place. We call the prophet Isaiah the Evangelical Prophet; for in him begin those fuller prophecies of the Gospel, of the Birth, the Office, the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, of the sending of the Spirit, and of the spread of the Gospel all over the earth, which no one can read without wonder and awe, as well as thoughtful gladness. But in one respect the prophet Ezekiel is even more remarkable than Isaiah. Ezekiel is especially the prophet of individual religion and heart service. Not that the other prophets do not speak of it. But it is the especial subject of Ezekiel. He dwells on it, he

insists on it, and writes long chapters about it in a way which is quite peculiar to himself. He detects the self-deceits by which men impose on themselves in serving God. He makes it clear that the great thing which decides any man's fate is, whether his heart within him is right with God. Thus in one chapter you will remember his strong warning against saying peace when there is no peace; and against building the wall with untempered mortar, telling those who did so, in words which are almost the same as our Lord's about the house built on the sand, that it must fall with the overflowing shower, and the great hailstones, and the stormy winds which would rend it. He is the prophet who speaks about the new heart and the new spirit; about taking away the stony heart and giving the heart of flesh. He is the prophet who warned the elders of Israel, that of all idols, the worst were the idols which men set up in their hearts, the sins which they secretly love and worship there. He warned them against coming to God with outward reverence while they set up idols in their hearts; and he warned them how God would answer the prayers of those who put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face, and asked counsel of Him in deceit and hypocrisy. And lastly, he impresses on the Israelites how God deals separately with each single soul of man; how He looks on us, visits us, punishes or saves us, not merely all together in a mass, as a nation or a church, but one by one, as separate souls; how, one by one, He will find each of us out in that vast crowd of souls, in which we seem to ourselves almost lost and hidden from Him.

He warns us how He will deal with each according to his own doings, and not according to the doings of others; how sinners shall not escape because of the righteousness of the righteous; and how the righteous man shall be taken care of, and shall not suffer for the sins of those in whose evil doings he had no part. He declared to them that in matters in which the souls of men were concerned, each man should answer for his own deeds alone; each man should be dealt with as if there were no one else in the world to stand before God the Judge; each man should reap just as he had himself sown.

This is the most striking peculiarity of the prophet Ezekiel, the prominence he gives to the great Gospel doctrine that each soul of man stands by itself, and must by itself stand or fall, not by anything outward, not by belonging to a favoured race or nation, not as having been once received as the child of God; but each man will be judged by what he is in himself, by having a changed heart or an unchanged one, by being faithful, obedient, and pure, or evil, rebellious, and unclean. He teaches the religion of true repentance, of inward hatred of and turning from sin, of the changed and renewed heart; not, indeed, as a new doctrine, but as a doctrine which must be insisted on and enlarged on, and driven home to the minds of the people.

The great point in the chapter from which the text is taken, is the doctrine that men will be judged according as God finds them when they die; by what they are then, not by anything that they have been before; the doctrine that men may change

from good to bad, and from bad to good, and that where there has been this change either way, God looks not to what was before the change, but only to what has come after it. And he teaches what was never before so fully announced in the Old Testament, that God will accept the sinner's repentance; that He longs for it and desires it; that His love is greater than His wrath; that He looks with compassion on every soul of man, and would save it if only man would turn to Him. "Behold, all souls are mine;" He made them for His own, not to be lost or saved by chance, but by what each should choose, of good or evil, or by what each should turn from and forsake after he had chosen it, of good or evil. Each should bear his own burden and not another's. Each should run his own race for himself, and win or lose his own crown. The father's sin should not hurt his children, the father's goodness should not save his children. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" each "in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." And the soul that is just, that doeth that which is lawful and right, in his righteousness that he hath done, in that shall he live. "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him," and upon him only; and "the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him," and upon him only. And yet it was not God's will that even the sinful soul should die. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord." God is no respecter of persons. What He looks at is the soul—not what it calls itself, not what it has done in days past, but what it is at this moment.

The man who was righteous once, and who walked in God's commandments, cannot escape from punishment if he has now turned to sin. "All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned. . . . When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." God is not partial. God is not to be bought from the rule of His justice to favour those who once pleased Him, if they now follow the sins which they once condemned.

But this awful fairness has another side—a side of gracious mercy as well as of strict severity. When the sinner repents, God will not remember against him his former sins, if he heartily turns from his evil ways and becomes a new man. His condition in God's eyes will change with his change of heart. "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him. . . . Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die." And so, after again and again making it clear, what is God's rule of dealing with the souls of men—that no outward or past thing weighs with Him against the real actual goodness or evil, holiness or unholiness, of the soul—that for no past goodness will God overlook wilful sin, and that for no past sin will He shut the doors of life to real repentance—the prophet ends with words which might be the words of the New Testament, of St. Paul himself: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all

your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, said the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."

These are, indeed, Gospel truths. The prophet, of course, does not say all that the Gospel has told us. He was not commissioned to tell why repentance is accepted, and *Who* it is that gives the new heart and the new spirit. He could not yet speak plainly of the Blood of the Lamb of God which alone washes out the sinner's stains, or of the Holy Ghost, by whose strength the sinner must be changed, and by whom righteousness and holiness are planted and nourished. Yet these truths of the prophet Ezekiel tell us how God looks upon us, and how He judges of us, and on what our fate depends. Not on what others have done, good or bad, not on what we have once been, but on what we are now at this moment, is our eternal doom depending. God looks at us, not as we think of ourselves, but according as we really are. God is the God of souls. "All souls are mine," He says. And souls cannot be hidden from His eye as to what they really are in themselves. They cannot be screened from His impartial judgment by what they think of themselves, or by what they hear others say of them, who cannot see into them as God does. And here we have His awful warning and his most merciful encouragement. For He reminds us that men may change. We go on living from day to

day without thinking much of our changing. We seem to ourselves, generally, much what we were. We hardly notice changes while they are going on. And one of these changes, scarcely noticed perhaps, is when we fall down, step by step, from the right way, into lower ways of carelessness and sin. When we do so, and anything alarms our conscience, we take refuge and comfort in remembering our old religious ways and thoughts, and fancying that we cannot be changed from what we were. We once did try to serve God, and we must be doing so still. But remember, it is all-important to make sure of it. "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Oh, what a solemn warning against carelessly slipping away from what we know to be right and good! God knows that men are so slow to believe that He can be seriously angry with those who seem to be on His side, and who have done well at some time of their lives. And so He holds up before our eyes our danger and His own rule. He bids us not forget that the righteous may change for the worse, and come to be even as the wicked. He warns us against hoping that past righteousness, that anything whatever except what the soul actually and really is, at the time of judgment, will weigh when the Judge comes to decide its doom.

But on the other hand, here is also given in the amplest terms the promise of forgiveness and life to the sinner who repents and turns from his evil ways. It is from this chapter that that most gracious assurance is taken, with which our service opens; and by which it encourages us to humble ourselves and to acknowledge our sins to God. "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." If there is a change in the soul for the worse, a change which quenches the good hopes of eternal life in those who forsake the good they once followed, there is also another change possible. There may be, blessed be God!—a change from darkness to light, a change from God's wrath to His favour, a change from sin to righteousness. The soul that sinneth, and that, if it continue in sin, if it die in its sin, must die eternally, need not die. Its former sins have not sealed its fate. A man who was once a sinner need not always be a sinner. God is not, to speak in human language, as it were, prejudiced against him for what he was. The doom on his sin may be recalled, and he may be once more received into favour. Let there only be the change—the change in the soul itself, the change of heart and thoughts, as well as of outward words and deeds; let there be the heart turned away from sin to follow and do righteousness, the new heart and new spirit, and the soul really turned to God—and the promise of mercy is as clear and strong as the warning of vengeance. God will look on the soul as it is now, not as it was in days past. God will forget what is past, and only deal

with what is the present fact. "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done," the righteousness of his changed, his new life, in this "he shall live."

Such is the promise, which was so fully unfolded, even before Christ came, by the prophet Ezekiel. We may call it the foundation stone on which the sinner's hopes rest, on which Christ built up His Gospel of mercy. As we are, not as we have been, so shall we be judged. And whatever we may have been, or may be still, yet the Judge who judgeth what is just and equal, still holds the door open. The wicked may still repent, may yet turn to Him with new heart and spirit; and the forsaken sin shall not be remembered against him. The evil, however great, on which we have honestly turned our backs, shall not rise up before us any more. Only remember this. Do not let us mock ourselves with a pretended change which is no change, with a turning which is not true repentance. And remember too, that it is only by what we are, not by what we mean to be, that God will judge us. We may change to-day, we may not be able to change to-morrow, for there may be no to-morrow for us to change in. Lose no time then, if you feel that you must change, in order that God may forget what you have been. You may make sure of God's mercy, you may make sure of His willingness to pardon you and to give you life. You may make sure of His unwillingness that even the sinner should die. But He must keep His word, that the sinner who dies unchanged and without repentance must die for ever. You may

make sure, if you will, of your own heart now; and you may, by God's grace, turn and become a new creature, and live for ever. The one only thing of which you cannot make sure is this—you cannot make sure of time.

XXXIII

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."—EPHESIANS iv. 30.

WE have a great work to do, and a short time, and great difficulties, to do it in. The work we have to do is to prepare ourselves, so as to be fit when we go hence, to be received into heaven. The time we have to do it in is this mortal life, with all its temptations, with all the weaknesses and sins of our own souls to strive against. Indeed the work is too great for us if we must do it all by ourselves. If we have but ourselves to trust to, it would be almost vain to try. We can do very well in this world. We have strength for the duties and tasks of this world. But when we think of another, when we lift up our thoughts to that world where God is, and where all who live there must be like God, in holiness and truth, and when we think of our becoming such as they are, our hearts sink within us. It seems impossible that we should ever attain to such a height. It seems impossible that we should be able to fight such a battle against the hindrances that stop our heavenward course, the discouragements, the self-deceits, the failures in our attempts to become

better, so as to give us any hope of being ready for our Master, ready to go in with Him to the marriage feast, when He calls us. Experience abundantly confirms what the Bible tells us, that of ourselves we can do no good thing, that in our own strength we cannot hope to do what God calls us to do, or to please our Master.

But God has not left us without help. Though we are so weak, though we can so little depend on ourselves, we need not fear or be cast down, or give up the work which we have to do, the work of becoming ready and fit for heaven. God has provided a Guide for us in our journey. Knowing that in ourselves there was no strength, He has provided a helper and strengthener, who can teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight. We cannot overcome the enemies of our souls alone, but neither are we fighting them alone. God has opened to us a source of spiritual health and grace, by which we may be renewed day by day, and hour by hour, as we need strength, as we meet temptation, as we are in danger of falling. He has given us a companion, a teacher, a supporter, who shall go with us all our life long, and be ready at our side with help, just fit and proportionate to our wants. From childhood to old age, from our baptism to our death, that heavenly Guardian and Comforter is ever watching over us, ready at any moment to take our part, to show us what to do, and to help us to do it. He was ready with such strength as we needed when we were children, for the trials of children. He is ready with such strength as we need now that we are grown up, for the trials of men. He it is, who is to prepare

us for becoming inhabitants of God's Holy Place. He it is, who was provided by God, to give us that strength which we know that we have not in ourselves. He it is, who is to go with us to the war, as Christ's soldiers and servants, and to hold us up when we faint, and to show us the path that we should walk in. He, I say, has been given us by God, as our daily Guide, and Counsellor, and Sanctifier, who is to be working in our hearts with His secret grace, to fashion and mould them, step by step, little by little, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And He has the power to give us strength, and to make us become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He has the power to help us against our sins and temptations. He has the power to fulfil what we cannot do for ourselves, to enable us to carry through the great work we have to do on earth.

He has the power, and who can doubt whether He has the will, to help us to the utmost? But if we would hope for His help—if, feeling our own hopelessness of making ourselves ready for God's heavenly kingdom, we turn to Him to supply our needs—we must bear in mind the Apostle's words: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." We must not grieve our Guide while He stays with us and watches over us. We must not provoke our heavenly Helper by pretending to trust Him while we do what we know He hates. We must not tempt Him by our disobedience, or by a hypocritical obedience, for He is One whom no craft or cunning of man can deceive; who is long-suffering indeed, and patient with our follies and transgressions, but who yet may be so

"grieved" by our sins as to leave us to ourselves, and whose place no one else can fill if He is provoked to leave us to our obstinacy and rebellion.

God has given us His Holy Spirit to be our Guide through life, to be our teacher and purifier, to fit us for His heavenly kingdom. But St. Paul tells us that we may "grieve" Him,—vex, displease, provoke Him, make Him sad in the midst of that work of mercy and loving kindness which He undertakes in order to win our hearts to God our Father. That is to say, that by resisting His warnings and whisperings in our consciences, by going contrary to what He puts into our hearts and makes us see to be right, by refusing to be led by Him when He shows us what we ought to do, we may show more and more that we do not belong to Him, that we do not wish for His help and guidance, that we prefer to walk alone, till at last, wearied out by our provocations and hardness of heart, He lets us have our way, and gives us up to the imaginations of our own hearts. That is what we are always in danger of whenever we grieve Him. That is what we must come to if we grieve Him too long, and presume too far on His patience.

We grieve Him whenever we yield to temptation, and follow sin which He is sent to keep us from, when we choose to listen to the devil's voice rather than to His. Let us look into our own hearts and lives, and see how often we must grieve Him. He is the Spirit of love. How must it grieve Him to see how love is set at nought among Christian people. How must it grieve Him to see how little harm people seem to think of cherishing malice and

ill-will in their hearts, to see how hard a matter it is to get them to give up a quarrel and really forgive what they suppose is an injury. How must it grieve Him as He accompanies us through the day, watching our dangers, ever anxious to help our weakness, to hear the words of unkindness, of peevishness, of jealousy, which drop from our mouths as the hours wear on, and which we take no care to stop. How must He grieve at the uncharitable suspicions and surmises, at the obstinacy with which we try to put the worst side on things, and stretch them from the truth to make them seem as bad as possible. How must it grieve Him to see the secret pleasure in our hearts with which we hear some story against a neighbour. Here is one thing which grieves Him bitterly. He who is the Spirit of love is being all day long provoked and offended by the lightness, the recklessness, the uncharitableness, in those whom He is sent to make fit for heaven. How can He make us fit while we grieve Him so? How can He make us fit when we think so little of anger, hatred, evil-speaking, revenge, which are as opposite to Him as darkness is to light? How can He help us when we grieve Him so deeply, and are not even sorry for it?

Again, He is grieved by all uncleanness in thought or word or deed. He is the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of purity, and with Him nothing filthy or abominable can be borne for a moment. And how much is there to grieve Him of this kind of sin! How many people are there who really see no sin in unchastity—no sin, but only disgrace and shame in the eyes of men—no sin, provided it is kept

secret and not found out—no sin, provided it is made up in time by marriage! How must our heavenly Guide and Comforter be grieved when He sees those who have been committed to His care, whom He has warned in their conscience, yielding to the snares and baits of Satan. How must He be grieved at the words and conversation which pass among those whom He is desiring to prepare to join with the songs of the saints and angels round God's throne. Think of the foul, hateful, shameful words which are heard in the mouths of those who also praise and bless the most Holy God—which are heard even in the mouths of little children, which they are ashamed to be overheard saying by men, but which they are not ashamed for God to hear—and think how God's Holy Spirit must look with grief on those who say such things. And He, too, sees in secret—He can see our thoughts and secret imaginations; and there also, how often does He behold what grieves Him; a heart which ought to be kept pure as the temple of God, filled with unclean fancies and desires, carefully hidden from men, but cherished and indulged and taken pleasure in within the soul, and filling it with all abominations. How can any one expect God's Holy Spirit to dwell with him when he gives entrance into his heart to the devils of lust and sin? How can any one expect that the Holy Spirit will enlighten, guide, support him, and make him fit for heaven, when he does not care about grieving Him by choosing darkness rather than light?

Again, He is the Spirit of truth, the lover and supporter of all that is true and honest and just. All

that is against truth, all that is against justice and honesty, is hateful to Him. He is grieved at all falsehood, in word or in deed. How must He be grieved then at the insincerity of Christians towards one another, when we change our words towards our neighbours to their face and behind their back; when we speak them fair as long as they are before us, but have quite a different story, when they are gone, and cannot hear our opinion of them; when we make a show of friendship as long as we think they may be useful to us and do us good, but speak roughly as soon as we have nothing more to get from them. Surely there can be few greater griefs to the Spirit of truth and faithfulness, than to see those whom He is striving to bring into the ways of truth, so hollow in heart, so full of false professions, and unmeaning, untrue words. And, if He is grieved at this, much more is He grieved at what many think so little of—open untruth. How many boys and girls are there among us, of whom we could say, that they would rather be punished than tell a lie—that we might be quite sure that whatever happened to them, however much they might be ashamed, they would tell the truth? Nay, how many boys and girls are there whose first thought, in a difficulty, would not be to get out of it by a lie? And now let us ask ourselves this: Are these boys and girls so very different from ourselves? Are they not our own children, our own bringing up? What reason can we have for thinking that they must be so much worse than we are, considering their youth, comparing their temptations with ours? If persons do not care about telling lies when they are young, do they for

the most part learn to love truth, and to stick to it, when they grow up? If our children do not mind telling lies now, when did they learn not to care about truth? If our children do not mind telling lies now, will they learn to hate a lie when they are grown up? Or is it not too much to be feared that if they do not mind telling a falsehood at home or at school now, they may grow up into not minding to shuffle, or even to take a false oath in a court of justice? And can we expect God's Holy Spirit to help us, can we wonder that He seems so far off from us, and to do so little for us, when so many, young and old, children and parents, grieve Him so heavily by carelessness about speaking the truth—the real, honest, straightforward truth?

He is grieved by malice and by unkindness, for He is the Spirit of love—by intemperance and uncleanness, for He is the Spirit of holiness—by insincerity and falsehood, for He is the Spirit of truth. And so every wilful sin, every sin that we do with our eyes open, knowing it to be wrong, grieves Him. And not only so. It is not only open disobedience and resistance that grieves us in our children and our servants; we are grieved and vexed also at carelessness in them, neglect, slackness. And so our Heavenly Guide is grieved when He sees that we are taking no care to keep ourselves from falling into temptation; that we will not take any trouble to please Him; when He sees us so satisfied and confident in ourselves, that we forget that we must lean on God for all our strength, and even for the very wish to serve Him. He is grieved when He sees us going headlong into ways in which we must fall.

He is grieved, not merely when He sees those whom He desires to take care of, in open sin, but when He sees that they are blindly and obstinately bent on something, which must in time lead them into sin.

And yet, without Him, there is no hope of the inheritance. Without that holy Guide, the true teacher of all renewed souls, the sanctifier of all who are to be with God hereafter, we wander through the wilderness of this world only to endless darkness. And shall we grieve Him—Him who so graciously and tenderly watches over us, who puts good thoughts into our hearts and warns us against evil ones, who makes us feel that, indeed, by throwing ourselves on His help, we may follow the good and avoid the bad? Shall we grieve Him, and drive Him away from us, by persisting in doing what we must know that He abhors; by bringing the works of darkness into a soul which He meant to be His own temple; by proudly or carelessly neglecting to keep a watch and a bridle against the wrong things we are likely to slip into? Shall we grieve Him, who feels a love and care for each one of us, above that of father or mother; who has been with us since our youth, striving with us amid our sins and rebellions, who has not yet left us in spite of all our unkindnesses to Him—the Blessed Spirit who has so often put us in the right way, who, if ever we stood upright, was the secret friend who protected us; who, if ever we have been kept from sin, that perhaps we half longed to do, was the gracious and watchful Guardian who saved us from ourselves? Shall we grieve Him any more? Is it not enough that we have done so hitherto? Have we not grieved and vexed Him sufficiently

yet? Have we found that our own ways brought us such comfort, and our own strength proved so sufficient, that we need none of His? Have we not tried His long-suffering enough yet? Oh, let us try and bring this thought home to us—I have God's Holy Spirit offered me for my Guide, my daily Strength, my Comforter; shall I grieve Him and drive Him away, by continuing in what He abhors? If we would only think of what this means, love and fear alike would lead us, with sorrow for having so unworthily scorned His goodness, to commit ourselves to His care and keeping, praying Him to watch over our ways, to bridle our tongue, to soften our hearts, to fill us with His blessed love, and never to leave us till He had made us fit for glory, and put the seal of death on our preparation. "O God, the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners!"

XXXIV

WHAT WILL BE WISHED FOR AT DEATH

"O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"—DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 29.

GOD did not mean us to live all our lives in the instant fear of death. God did not mean us to have the awful thought of death, as we shall probably have it one day, continually before our minds. For that would be too much for us; it would darken and overwhelm us. It would make it difficult to follow our business, or use the talents which God has committed to us, to be used for the good of our brethren and for His own glory. It would unfit most of us for life and work altogether. But though God did not mean us to be always thinking of death, He did mean us to remember it often, to remember it seriously. It is too certain a thing, and too important an event to every one of us, for any man of common sense not to take it into account continually, even when he is most busy, and can least feel or fancy to himself what it will be to die when the time really comes.

We shall do well then, from time to time, seriously, and in the fear of God, to try and imagine to ourselves what will be to us the thoughts

and the feelings of death. For it is not a thing which may or may not happen to us, not a thing like an accident or a sickness, or a special misfortune, which many men escape from, and so may we; it is a thing which there is no escaping from, which we must become acquainted with, and therefore ought to make up our minds to. A man would be a fool for disquieting himself with the thought whether he should be killed in a train, or should be struck by lightning; because these are such chances, that it is much more likely that he will not meet them than that he will. But death in itself is not like these. We each of us know that we shall one day die, as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow; that if we could only see it, the year, and the month, and the day of the week, and the hour, is marked, on which we must go through what others have gone through. But though it is right to let this thought have a place in our minds at the proper time, it is not good to be always dwelling on it; and further, it is not possible.

But there is one way of remembering our latter end, which may mingle with our most earnest business, and our happiest days, without overwhelming us with awe and anxiety. There is one way of remembering it which may well stay by us all day long, and be continually present to our thoughts. For it need not disturb, but only quicken and stir us up to exertion and usefulness. It will indeed check us in what is evil and vain, but it will make life all the busier and all the happier in what is good. I mean, if we would ask ourselves this question continually, What shall I wish I had done

in this matter when I come to die, and when I look back on it from the neighbourhood of the grave? For this is a question which does not so much oppress us with the terrors of death, as open our eyes to the real truth about what we are at the moment engaged in. It is a question not to make us sad and downcast, but to make us honest and sincere; to waken us up from the self-deceit and carelessness which we are so apt to fall into in matters of duty; and to enable us to see in its true colours whatever is before us, whether of duty, or of pleasure, or of advantage, or of suffering.

It is a question to ask ourselves, for instance, whenever some opportunity of doing good or being useful presents itself, and we are doubtful about embracing it. To all of us, opportunities and chances are continually happening, of doing some good thing, for which God will remember us, and for which others will be the better. How often does it happen that we see plainly enough what we might do, what would be the right thing to do—and yet something stops us. What is it that stops us? Sometimes we do not like the trouble. That is one check that, I am afraid, most of us must quite understand. It is a good thing to do, we think, but then there is all the effort we must make, all the responsibility and risk, all the worry and anxiety which we take on ourselves, which we might keep out of by leaving it alone. Or perhaps we are ashamed and kept back by what people will say of us. Or perhaps we may be damaging our own interests by it. But in one way or another so it is, that opportunities of good are continually coming to

us, and, for one reason or another, we let them slip by.

But now, let us the next time such an opportunity comes, let us fairly ask ourselves this: I know that I shall one day have to die, and then how shall I look back on this opportunity, and on the reasons which keep me back from improving it? Judge, even from your feelings now, about things that have happened in days past. Can you not recollect something or other in which you might have done good, might have relieved suffering, might have comforted the distressed, might have raised up the fallen, and you did not do it, either because you thought it too much to expect of you, or because you were ashamed to be seen doing it, or because you were too lazy and would not take the trouble? And how do you feel about that now? Do not you wish with all your heart now that you could look back and feel that you had seized the opportunity; do not you feel how poor and feeble the reasons were, of shyness or trouble or selfishness, which were strong enough to keep you back when the chance was in your hands? I do not think I can be mistaken in supposing that most of us must have some feelings of this kind. And if you have these feelings now, how much more keen will they be when you find that you are going to have done with this world, and have to prepare for what is to be after death? If with life still before you, and with no reason to think it is going to end, you can see through the excuses which you have sometimes made to save yourself from doing a disagreeable duty, or from seizing the chance of doing a Christian action, depend

upon it your conscience will be much more alive and awake when you have left life all behind you, and before you there is only death. You cannot doubt that one of the bitterest thoughts of the hour of death will be the opportunities of good wasted and abused. Well, then, I say, let that thought stay with you now. Let the light of truth be reflected and shine back from your dying hours on to what fills your living hours now. Put yourself in the position of looking back to what is before you at present. Try and judge of it, of the reasons that keep you back from doing good now, and of the worth of the excuses you make to yourselves; try and judge of them as you will assuredly judge of them when death opens your eyes. Then you will wish to have let nothing stand between you and your duty. Then you will wish that the law of your life had been daily that of the Preacher: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Again ask yourself — How at the hour of death, looking back on my past life, shall I wish that I had said my prayers? The prayers that will really help and bring comfort to you then, are not so much the prayers that you will say then, but the prayers that you say now. You have got up this morning, and I trust that most of you have said private prayers of your own. You have come to Church and asked God, in words at least, to carry you safe through life to His eternal joy, to defend you from danger, to forgive your sins, and in the hour of death to deliver you. Can you honestly

think that you have said these prayers with such attention, with such earnestness, with such heart, that you may hope that God saw that you were desirous that they should be heard; that you may hope, for Christ's sake, that you have not prayed in vain? Let each man's conscience answer, whether this morning his prayers have been said without his thoughts wandering, and with deep and thorough earnest; or whether, if not so, at least he has *tried* to attend, has struggled against wandering thoughts, has brought back his mind from other things when it began to slip away to them, has been sorry and grieved to find himself so careless and inattentive; or whether he has not really thought at all of the prayers he was saying, whether he has said them only with his lips while his heart has been far away, asleep or busy about other things as different as possible from the words of his prayer. Now suppose you were to remember the prayers of this day on your deathbed, what would you feel about them? If you have been inattentive, cold, careless—without devotion, without even the wish to be earnest in prayer, would you not feel that you would give anything that you had used this morning in real and not pretended prayer instead of having wasted it? And do not you think that it would have helped you to be attentive if, when you had come into Church, you had thought, How, when I come to die, shall I wish that I had prayed this morning? And do not you think that when, in private or public prayer, you find yourself repeating words by rote, with your mind far away on other things, if that solemn thought were to rise up before you, of the light in which you will look back on such

vain, profitless prayers, one day hence—one day which God knows of—do not you think that it would be a wholesome check, and might help you against the great sin of inattentive prayers, and the great trouble and difficulty of wandering thoughts?

Again, ask yourself this: How shall I look back on quarrels and annoyances from the day of my death? How shall I wish then that I had behaved in them? What part should I then wish that I had taken respecting them? While we have life before us and are strong, quarrels and offences seem very hard things to get over. It seems so important that we should stand on our rights, that we should not allow ourselves to be *put upon*, that we should show that we have spirit, that we should make those who have offended us feel that we are angry, and have good reason to be so, and are not to be trifled with. Jesus Christ would teach us that there is a very different way of looking at such things, but I am not speaking of this just now. But only think how different these things will look in the light thrown on them by death; how in that hour of truth, and of the greatness and vastness of eternal things, our jealousies and quarrels will fade and shrink up into trifles. There may be persons who carry their enmities with them to death, and even then think them matters of importance. But most people look back on them with very different feelings. They then see about what very trifles and follies they quarrelled. They then see how silly and stupid it was to take such offence at such small things; that if either party had really had good sense, the quarrel would soon have been made up, and that they were

wrong in the end, if not in the beginning, by being so obstinate and unwilling to make it up. These things, I am sure, we shall most of us feel about our quarrels, if we remember them on our deathbed. And if we would only *now* get to look at them as we shall *then*, surely we should try to put a check on them even in the moment of anger and vexation. This will help us to overcome our evil tempers, our injustice and unfairness, our bitterness and selfishness, and to behave in our disagreements with our brethren so that we may not be ashamed and sorry for our folly, when death comes to search our hearts and to open our eyes.

These are ways in which the thought of death ought to be constantly present to us all, as a thought to quicken and stir us up, to restrain us from those things in which health, and strength, and the present world, deceive and confuse our minds. "The night cometh, when no man can work." That is what we ought to feel of death; that it is daily leaving us less time to do what God gave us to do; that there is no time to lose, no time to waste in foolish pretences and "shadows of religion;" no time to give to delays and loiterings. Death is close behind us. We are running a race with him; and sooner or later he must overtake us, for he is coming nearer and nearer. And if we have not reached the city of refuge before he comes up to us, we are lost. How bitterly shall we reproach ourselves, how terrible will be our anguish, when we look back from the end on these days now present, days of quiet, days of liberty, which will soon be gone, and think that all the opportunities they brought with

them slipped away without our caring to profit by them!

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Turn thee again, O Lord, at the last, and be gracious unto Thy servants. O satisfy us with Thy mercy, and that soon; so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life."

XXXV

THE MEANING OF THE WORLD

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—1 St. John ii. 15.

We hear a great deal said in Scripture about the world—the evil of the world—the love of the world; and we ought to take care that we understand rightly what is meant by these words. I do not know anything of greater consequence towards making our religion a real and solid thing, than knowing what we mean, and having the right meaning, when we use the common, familiar, religious words about it. And I do not know any habit that we are more apt to fall into, than that of using words without thinking of what they mean. Faith, and grace, and sin, and repentance, and forgiveness, and salvation, and a number of words of the same kind, are for ever coming up, when we read the Bible or hear sermons. And we go on hearing them again and again, without asking ourselves whether we do more than hear them with our ears; whether in our minds they stand for something of which we take in the meaning. And so we go on hearing without profit, because we never ask our-

selves whether we really know what is meant by these words, which seem so plain and easy to understand.

Such a word is that which is so common in all religious books and discourses—the world. The world is spoken of as an enemy, a temptation, a danger. The love of this world is what we are continually warned against. Worldliness is one of the worst signs against a man; one of the sins which, in words at least, we all acknowledge to be inconsistent with true religion. Everybody can talk against worldliness; every one allows that it is wrong to love the world. Ought we not then to know as clearly as we can, what is meant by the world?

There can be no doubt or mistake that this is the true and right way of speaking. When in our baptism we renounce the "vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same;" when in our Catechism we are taught to look on the world as one of the three great enemies of our souls; when in the collect we pray to God to give us grace to resist the "temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil"—we are but speaking as the Bible has taught us, we are but calling the world our enemy, because the Bible tells us that it is so. "Know ye not," says St. James, "that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The whole world," St. John says in

another place, "lieth in wickedness;" and the great victory of faith is that it overcomes the world. And our Lord Himself speaks in the same way about the world. Those who are not His, are the children of the world. His, and our great spiritual enemy, the devil, is called by Him "the Prince of this world." Christ's kingdom is "not of this world." They who are His are hated by the world; they are said to be not of this world, even as He is not of this world. The world, in all these passages, and they are but a few out of many like them, stands for something confessedly evil and contrary to the Gospel, inconsistent with God's service, and fatal to men's souls.

What then is meant by the world? What is this terrible world which rises up in the pages of Scripture as the mighty and dangerous foe of Christ in His kingdom? What is that corrupting world to which it is as much as their souls are worth, that Christians be not "conformed"? What is this "present evil world," out of which their prayer and hope is to be delivered? I suppose if we were asked to explain in other words what it is, our first answer would be something of this kind—that the world means all this present state of things which men are so fond of, this present state of things, this present life, and what belongs to it. That is the natural answer of most people to the question, What is meant in the Catechism or in the Bible by the world? Must we then regard this present state of things, and all that belongs to it, with the feelings which the Bible tells us that Christians ought to have towards the world? If so, what a life are we all leading? If the world

means simply this present state of things, and if worldliness means the love of what belongs to this present state of things, what are we all doing? We have families and family ties, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and children; our hearts are full of them—we love them, and are bound up with their lives and happiness. And do not family ties and interests belong to this present state of things? We have our business and work, one after this manner, another after that; work which takes up our time and thoughts, and gives us enough to do to get through it, whether it be with our hands or with our brains, whether it be our farm or our day's labour, our merchandise, or our learning and teaching. Our days are given to it, we think it right to be thorough and earnest in it, and if we are doing it as we ought, we find real pleasure in doing it to the very best of our power. And do not all the businesses and works of man—works of his hands or of his mind, every pursuit and calling in which he is employed—do not they all belong to this present state of things? We have many pleasures and enjoyments that God has graciously given to us; we enjoy the bounty of His creation, the beauty and glory of the sun and the light, of the trees and fields, of the sea and of the mountains, the flowers of the spring, and the richness of the summer, and the golden harvest of the autumn. We rejoice over the great and wonderful inventions of man's skill and power; we delight in reading the beautiful and marvellous things and thoughts which men have handed down to us in their books. But are not all these of this present state of things? And are not

these the things among which our life is spent? In these is our chief employment, our chief pleasure. As long as we are here we are full of these. And are they simply part of that world which lieth in wickedness, which we have renounced? Are they part of that world, of which it is said that whoso loveth it must be the enemy of God?

If so, what is there for us but simply to go out of the world and have no more to do with it? It is quite certain that what we are all busy about is of this present state—that it is but for a time, and must vanish and pass away, as we are told in Scripture that the world must do. And if the world means this present state, and if all love and care for this present state is worldliness, it would seem impossible to follow our callings, to love our families, to rejoice in the joys of this life, and also to obey the command to renounce the world and worldliness, as we promised to do in our baptism.

But is it not much more likely that we have not understood what the Bible means by the world; that we have used the word at random, because we have heard it in the mouth of others, and perhaps we thought it a fine thing to talk against the world, and to condemn our neighbours as worldly? If what the Bible means by worldly means everything which belongs to this present state, which of us does not love the world, which of us is not a worldling, a servant of Mammon? But that cannot be the right meaning We use the word without thinking of what it really means. We let ourselves get into uncharitable ways of denouncing, as of the world and worldly, some particular things against which we have a

prejudice, or which are done by people we do not like; and we never think whether what we do like, and allow ourselves in, does not belong just as much to the world. Or, seeing what is clear and certain enough, that God did mean men to be busy with the things of this present state, and to enjoy the blessings and gifts of His good creatures here, we persuade ourselves that there is no meaning at all in what is said of the evil and danger of the world, and no such sin really as what is called worldliness. We flatter ourselves that we need not be on our guard, and throw aside all that religion urges to awaken and alarm us, so that its sternest and most awful lessons fall dead on our ears and hearts.

What then does the Bible mean when it condemns and warns us against the world? Not simply the things of this present state, or the love and care for them—for our families, which God bids us love and provide for; for our business, in which He bids us be diligent and earnest; for temporal gifts and enjoyments, which He bids us rejoice in and give thanks for. They are all of this present state, and of this only. And if they were "the world," against the love of which He warns us, He would be giving us with one hand what with the other He was beckoning us to refuse. The world, which the Bible warns us against, is not simply this present state of things; but this present state of things, set against, and preferred to the world to come, to eternity. If there was no heaven and no hereafter, we should have nothing to think of but this present state. But there is a hereafter—there is a heaven to be gained or lost; and this being so, this present state, what-

ever be its goodness or desirableness, must of course be of very trifling moment when it is compared and weighed against that which is to come. So if we choose this present life *rather* than life eternal, we choose what the Bible calls "this world." If we are so full of the things which belong to this present state, however in themselves lawful and innocent and right, that we forget that other world, then our hearts are full of what the Bible calls "the cares of this world." If we who are Christians, and have the promise of an everlasting inheritance, live like heathens, who know nothing of any promise of everlasting life, we are living a worldly life, a life conformed to this world. If we love anything of this present state so much as to drive out of our hearts the love of our Father and God, and the wish to be like Him, and to be with Him for ever, we have that love of the world which the Bible declares is enmity towards God. He Himself bids us love our neighbours, love our friends, love father and mother, wife and children; but if we love these more than Him, we choose our portion with this world, and are not worthy of Him and of His kingdom. This is what the Bible means by the world, by the love of this world, by worldliness; not simply this present state, in which we must have our dealings, our interests, our deepest human love and affection, but this present state, whenever and under whatever circumstances, it is the one only thought and love of our hearts; whenever it throws the other, the eternal state, into the shade, and makes us forget it, and live as if it were not to be; when we sacrifice the hope of that future blessedness

to anything whatever, to hope or fear, to pleasure or advantage here. In one word, the present state of things becomes "the world" to us, with all its dangers and evils, whenever it becomes all in all to us, and whenever we use this world without remembering that it is God's world.

It is not in the things themselves that we are to look for that evil world which is one of our three great enemies, and which, with the devil and the lusts of the flesh, we renounced in our baptism; not in the things themselves, but in our way of using them, our way of loving and following them. They are, in themselves, what God has made good, and given to us for this space of our mortal life; they are for our benefit, our comfort, our admiration; we cannot do without them; and here we were not meant to do without them. But the moment that we lift them up to take exclusive possession of our hearts, which something better and greater than they ought to have, we make them the evil world to us. The moment we put them in the place of God, or make them the reason for not obeying and serving God as we ought to do, we turn them into that fatal world, to be bound to which is to lose our souls. If we find that, in fact, they keep us from thinking of eternal things, we may be sure that we are in danger from the world; not because they are bad in themselves, but because our hearts are wrong. It is the forgetfulness of God's love and goodness and holiness, the dislike to obey His laws, the turning away of the soul from the remembrance of Him—it is the fault and sin in man himself, which finds snares where God placed blessings, and which fills so widely human

society with the sin of worldliness, that the Apostle speaks of the whole world lying in wickedness.

Now, here is a meaning of the world, which does not drive us from the enjoyments of this life, or shut us out from its blessings ; but which certainly will not let any one say that worldliness is one of those empty words, of which we cannot find the clear reality and meaning in actual life. For if worldliness is not simply the love of this life, but the loving of it better than the love of the other, the sacrificing the hopes of the other to the good of this—then, surely, most people's conscience must know what it means. Most people must remember times, when what was only of this world, came into opposition with something that belonged to the other ; and most people must remember times, when the things of this life prevailed over, and cast out, all thought and care for the other. If any one so love the world, surely, as St. John says, "the love of the Father is not in him." If he so love this present state of things, that he deliberately shuts his eyes to that gracious and glorious promise of a better, which the Father in His love to us has revealed, the love of the Father cannot be in him. If he is so satisfied with this life, that he deliberately chooses to have his portion here, it is no hard thing to say that there is enmity between him and his God. If he deliberately makes his religion give way to his worldly interests or earthly affections, he cannot be excused because worldly interests and earthly affections are not sinful in themselves ; he cannot thus escape the charge of serving Mammon more than Christ, of being a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. And "what shall it profit a

man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The world, the present state of things, has its excellences, its marvellous blessings, its unspeakable gifts; they are great, and greatly to be prized, and greatly to be given thanks for. Let no one speak scornfully of them, lest he be found to speak foolishly and unthankfully. Let no one say that they are not meant for the use and profit of man; for they are the gifts of our Father's love to His creatures. But at the best, what are they? They do not last, they cannot be kept. And we—we immortal, undying spirits—we last beyond them; we live on, to find them gone. We shall be living on when they have been long forgotten. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof;" even so, whether we use the world rightly or abuse it, in either case it passes away; the gifts of God which we have sanctified by thanksgiving, and those which we have set up as idols against their Giver, and so turned into snares—alike they pass away; and leave us—the spirit and living soul, which even death does not kill—leave us, who cannot pass away into nothingness as they do—leave us to receive the fruit and reward of our use of them. And then, with this certainty before our eyes, can we prefer them to God? Oh, what reason there is to be watchful, lest in our employment and use of the things of this present time, we forget all about that time which is soon to come. We have no business to decline the things of this present time. We have no business to fasten the name of worldliness on a busy and earnestly occupied life, or on the full and keen enjoyment of the countless blessings which God

showers on it. It is part of our trial, to serve and remember God in the round and bustle of our common work-a-day life. But after all, it is but a short interest that we have in it. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." Can we hear these solemn words without being moved? And shall we not lay them to heart?

XXXVI

THE USE OF SUNDAY

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."—EXODUS xx. 8.

TO-DAY is our last Sunday this year. We are meeting for the last time in Church in this division and round of time which we call the year. And to do a thing for the last time, whatever it is, and much more if it is a thing we have been doing as a regular custom for any length of time, has always something solemn in it. All endings remind us of the last ending. All last times are shadows and tokens of the coming last time of all. All partings have in them a savour of that parting, once for all, that leave-taking after which there is no meeting again, which is in store for all who are now together. When we come to the end of anything, we seem to be standing on a brink and edge; behind us is what we have known and been used to, before us is the unknown darkness which stretches onward for ever and ever. A year is but a division that we have made ourselves. But we are so used to it, and it does so really make a division in things which most concern us in our present life, that we feel about the year that is gone, and the year that we look forward to, as if they

had an actual substance of their own, as if each year had a real beginning, and middle, and end, like the life of a man. It is, of course, only a way of counting days, and dividing the course of time ; but we cannot help feeling the division as if it was quite a real one. The end of each year brings us, as it were, to a halting-place, and a new starting-point, in life. We feel that so much more of our time is gone, and the year is the measure of it. So now we are come to a Sunday, which we feel to be a last Sunday. We shall have no more Sundays this year. We shall never again meet in Church this year. The year has run out, and is taken out of our hands, Sundays and week-days. We are brought to a close, a winding-up, a break in the course of our life ; what we call *this year*, is done with for ever on the earth.

The last Sunday, and last service and meeting together of the year, ought to lead us to think of many things. One of these things I will mention. It ought to lead us to think how we have employed our Sundays—what use have we made of them ?

Carry your thoughts back to last Christmas, and the beginning of the year. Think how many times Sunday has come since then. In the dark and short days of winter, and when the spring was beginning, and when all was changed to the green and warmth, the hot sun and long days of summer, when the harvest was being carried, when once more the leaves began to fall and the days to draw in again—all along, always, Sunday came regularly. Sunday, whether wet or dry, dark or bright, a different day from all other days—Sunday, with its rest and break in the week—Sunday, with its Church bells and its services

of prayer and praise. Those fifty-two Sundays, what have they done for us? What have we done with them, and what profit have we got out of them? How are we the better for them, what might we have done with them, what ought we to have done with them? What is Sunday for? What use was meant to be made of it?

Sunday was meant to be a continual break in our worldly work and worldly thoughts. Worldly business and work is our portion and our duty for the present. But worldly business and work would overwhelm us, would wear out in us every thought and feeling of higher things, would deaden in us all wishes and all hopes, and all belief besides, if it was not from time to time forced to be stopped and put aside. It is a mighty power, and takes up our thoughts and our time; it leaves no time for anything in our minds besides itself. Even with the continual check of Sunday ever coming round, the world and its business is too strong and engrossing for us. What would it be without this check? What would it be without this check which we cannot quite escape from, to turn aside our thoughts for a moment, to force us to rest and be quiet at least outwardly, to give us the chance of a little breathing-time in the hurrying bustle of life? Once every seven days, our labour, whatever it is, must stand still. The Sunday morning dawns upon us to remind us, to force us to remember, that there is another world besides this one in which we labour and are full of anxious cares. The Sunday morning comes with its well-known sounds, with its well-known duties, to bring to our thoughts our relationship to a King and

Father who is not of this world, our interest in our inheritance in Heaven, our union with that heavenly family of which Christ is Head. Sunday comes in the middle of our ploughing and reaping, our planting and building, our marrying and giving in marriage, to tell us of sin and of redemption, of grace and of judgment, of danger which we cannot see, and of hopes which have nothing to do with this world: of One who came from the glory of the Father, to live and die and rise again, that we might live for ever. Sunday comes to break the thread of our worldly thoughts; to give us the chance—if we will—of thinking about something else; to ease the strain and stress with which they press upon us. We may say what we will about the weight of worldly cares, the claims of worldly business; but the pause and rest and break of Sunday warns every one, and is the opportunity to every one, to turn away his thoughts for a little space from what binds his soul to this world, and makes him dead and insensible to the next.

But Sunday is not only for this. It is not merely to stop our thoughts and work in this world, it is also to give us the opportunity of learning about what is *not* of this world. To those whose time is taken up in the week, Sunday should be their day of learning; of reading, if they can read; of hearing, if they cannot read. When I speak of learning, I mean learning by themselves in private; learning, and becoming acquainted, as far as they can, with what God has told us in the Bible. For unless people will read, and think over what they read, in private, I hold it quite impossible that they can

profitably learn much from what they hear of the Word of God in public. But just think what we might do, if we but chose, with the Sundays of our life. Just think what we might have done with the fifty-two Sundays which we have left behind us this year. Supposing a man only to have read one chapter each Sunday in the Gospels, which tell us about the life and death of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and to have read it, not merely to be able to say that he has read it, but so as to know what he was reading about, and to think over the things which he read about as they are told us in the Holy Book—how much might he have learnt in the one year, how much would he have come in this one year to know of what his Saviour was really like in His ways and words and thoughts, and how different would His whole story seem to him from what it is to one who knows the name of Jesus Christ as little more than a matter of words, or has just caught up, perhaps, some little knowledge about His life and death. Or again, if any one would take his Prayer Book, and read by himself what we read in Church on the different Sundays, as in the course of the year we go through the great things that Christ did for us—His Birth, His showing to the Gentiles, His Temptation, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension, the coming of the Holy Ghost, the revelation of God in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—what a treasure of knowledge might he have gained, step by step, of what a Christian ought to know, of what ought to be a Christian's hope and comfort and trust. And surely, if the Sunday was meant by God for anything, it was meant that busy men might have

one day in the week to learn the things on which their hopes depend, and who can doubt how much a busy man might learn if only he would give part of his Sunday, as a regular thing, to quiet, attentive, serious reading of his Bible and Prayer Book.

And lastly, Sunday was meant to be more even than this. It was meant not merely for rest, not merely for instruction; but that on it our souls might draw fresh supplies of grace and strength, and holy thoughts and purposes, to do our work in the world as Christian men ought to do it. It was meant to be an opportunity for prayer; for that upraising and purifying of our souls which comes with prayer; for that correcting what is amiss in them, and setting them in the right direction, which comes with honest examination and trial of them; for that strengthening them in all good, for that realising more and more clearly the truth and greatness of the things told us about God and our souls, which comes, and only comes, with the quiet, earnest communion of the soul with God. Each Sunday is the first day of each week; and in its Sunday each week was meant to have its day of special grace, its day, when the gates of heaven are more widely open for the promised gifts to come down on men's souls; the day in which men, whose work and duty lie among the things of this world, might be refreshed, and enabled to go forth again unto them, with the hopes and grace of the world to come upon their spirits.

Now, on this last of all these Sundays, which we have had this year, let us ask ourselves how we have used them. How have we spent them? Sunday

is a day for shutting out the work and worry and care of the world. When our Sunday comes, do we receive it in the spirit and meaning with which God appointed it; and for the day, do we try to resist the crowding and pressing of worldly thoughts into our minds? Do we try to make a break in them; to stop them, and check them, and keep from making Sunday the same in its thoughts as other days? Again, how have we used the Sunday as a day of learning, a day of reading, a day when we could improve our knowledge of God's will, and of the wonderful things which He has done for us, even from the beginning of the world? Ask yourselves, What have I learnt on Sunday? How much more do I understand of the Bible for the fifty-two Sundays of this past year? How much more have I read of it—not read merely for form's sake, but to know and understand, and feel, and remember it? And again, How have I used the Sundays, to accustom my soul to religious and devout communion with God, my Maker and Keeper, my Saviour and Redeemer, my Father and my Judge? On other days, perhaps, your time is short for prayer, for quiet serious thinking about everlasting things. But not so on Sunday. Then your time is for the most part your own. Then, if you will, you can find some leisure to retire and to be alone with God and Christ. Have you done so? Have you tried to ask for grace and help, for the temptations and difficulties which meet you in the week?

And think of this too. Once every month at least, in one Sunday out of four or five, the way has been open to you, to come and refresh your souls in

a still more solemn and sacred way. One Sunday out of four you might have come and met your Saviour where He promises to meet you, in His Holy Sacrament. Have you come, or have you slighted His invitation? On this last Sunday of the year, what are your thoughts about all these Sundays of special grace, of richer, more heavenly comfort? Have they been used, or have they gone by you in vain; have they rolled away into the days that are past, and are you none the better for their offered blessings?

On the way in which we spend our Sundays, depends, for most of us, the depth, the reality, the steadiness, of our religious life. If we waste our Sunday, if we do not fence it off from other days, if we do not use the leisure it gives us, and invites us to employ in learning, and reading, and prayer, our week-day religion will not thrive. To spend Sunday religiously is not religion, but it is a powerful help—a help we cannot do without—to being religious at other times, when it is not Sunday.

Once more, bring back before your minds, what your opportunities have been this year, of deepening in your souls the impression of truth, of strengthening them in the way of holiness and faith and peace. Think of what you might have done in all those Sundays, coming so close and fast one after another. A very little, honestly and regularly done each Sunday, would have come up to a great deal by this time. You might have got rid of much evil, and fixed many excellent things in your ways of life. How have you employed the Sundays? Have you used them, or have you lost for ever the chances they brought you

of improvement, the openings they gave you of change, of newness of life, of grace? Have you let the cares of the week take possession of the Sunday morning too? Have you let its hours pass in idle, lazy, useless lounging? How much have you read, how much have you learnt, during those Sundays, of God's word and truth? What part of them have you given to private and quiet thoughts on the hopes and prospects of an immortal soul, redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ, and looking forward to the everlasting world? Perhaps if we would give a few minutes to these thoughts, and allow ourselves to see and understand all that we have wasted, that we have lost for ever, in the Sundays of this year, it might lead us to try, by God's help, to make a more profitable and more Christian use of the Sundays which He may grant us in the year which is coming.

XXXVII

ALL SAINTS' DAY

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith."—HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

THUS does the Apostle wind up that glorious history of faith and holiness which he sets before us in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He goes back to the beginning of the world, and one by one, he calls up before us the name and remembrance of God's great Saints and Servants. He gathers, as it were, all together in one heavenly company, those who had already fought the good fight, and entered into their rest—the general assembly and church of the first-born, the first-fruits of man's race to God. And then he brings us, whose race is not yet over, and who have yet to enter into rest—he brings us to behold them by faith; to see what they, by faith, did and endured for God; to see them all around us, safe in the courts of God's House above, sitting on their thrones of glory, watching us, how we acquit ourselves in the same trial, how we fulfil the trust our Lord has given us, how we bear what they bore so faithfully, the burden which God puts on each

man to bear, the Cross which Christ has told us we must all take up. And then the Apostle bursts forth in words of encouragement and good comfort, like a great general cheering on his soldiers to battle and victory, and bids us stir ourselves up with so great a thought to continued perseverance in our own heavenly race. With such a "cloud of witnesses" all round us—witnesses to the power of faith over the world and temptation, witnesses looking on to see whether we do as bravely and as well as they did, witnesses before whom we ought to be ashamed to do our work slothfully and like cowards—he bids us rise up and start with greater energy in the race, casting aside all weights that may make our running less easy, and every bosom sin, different to different men, which entraps our feet, and clogs or trips us up. And above all the examples of faith and holiness, he places before our eyes, as the mark to run to, Him who is the Author and Finisher of all faith, the Beginner of it, and its End and Crown, Jesus Christ, the Lord and the Example of all saints, in their sufferings for His sake, in their victories over sin, and in their reward, in their cross and in their crown; "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

What the Apostle says in this passage, this day ought to bring back into our minds. It ought to bring to our remembrance the mighty number of those whom God has redeemed from sin and death and made worthy for Himself. It ought to remind us what vast multitudes of men, sinners once, weak, ignorant, and in danger like ourselves, have by faith

fought the great fight, and are now safe in Paradise. It reminds us of what men can do, by God's help and grace, to please and glorify Him, and that numbers have done so ; that it is not merely a few, a small company, exceptions, and stray cases here and there, who have succeeded in setting sin and the devil at defiance, and walking in the love and fear of God, but a great and countless army. It reminds us that when St. Paul calls on us to perfect holiness in the fear of God, he calls us, not to something which ordinary men cannot do, but to something which thousands and tens of thousands have, by God's grace, found the way to accomplish. It reminds us how God has fulfilled His promise to those who sought Him, both in this world and in the next ; how in this world, those who cast themselves on His mercy and made up their minds at all risks to follow Him, even through the deep waters and the fiery furnace, have found, more enduring and stronger than their tribulation, His pardon, and peace, and hope ; how in the world to come their short affliction, which was but for a moment, has long ago wrought for them a far more exceeding weight of glory. This day reminds us not only of what the Apostle set before his disciples, but of something more. It reminds us how much greater and goodlier is the roll and number of God's saints, how vastly it is swelled and increased since the Apostle wrote the words of the text to the Hebrews. The "cloud of witnesses" which he spoke of was only of the saints under the Old Covenant. He could not yet speak of those who, in the name and by the faith of Christ, were to overcome the

world, and rise to even greater heights of holiness and love. For us this day brings back the remembrance of a far larger experience of the power of God's grace, than even an Apostle had—of eighteen hundred years more of the working of the Holy Spirit in the world. It brings before us not only the Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets, but, what in his day the Apostle could not yet speak of, the Glorious Company of the Apostles themselves, the Noble Army of Martyrs, and all those of all ages and all lands, who through them have learned the name and salvation of the Redeemer, and have trodden in their footsteps in the path that leads to God.

This is our great encouragement, our great comfort, our solemn warning, who live in the end of time. We have actually seen more than Apostles and Prophets of the work of God in the souls of men, of the power of faith, of the heights to which holiness can rise, of the marvels of the love of God. We have actually seen the Gospel tried more widely, and for a longer time, tried with different races and in different ages, put to the proof in lands as far apart as north from south, and in times and generations as separated from one another in thoughts and customs as men can be, and yet it has never failed. Everywhere it has been still the power of God unto salvation, everywhere it has borne its fruit—among civilised men, and among barbarians, among rich and among poor, among the men we live with in this century, and the men of ten or fifteen centuries back, when no language which is spoken now was spoken, and when nothing was the same, nothing was in common between

them and us, but the Name and Gospel of our common Saviour. To the early Christians, to St. Paul's disciples, the Gospel was a new religion; they felt its power in themselves, they saw how its followers suffered and overcame, but they had not seen what would come of it in the long-run; they might believe, but they could not tell from experience how it would spread, how it would last on for hundreds of years after they were dead. This is what we have seen. Never has it failed, though among so many enemies, and in the midst of such tremendous dangers. Never has God been without His saints on earth, the witnesses to the world of His truth, and of the power of His Holy Spirit, to turn men's hearts from darkness to light, from sin to holiness. Men are still the same, still born into the world sinners, and with the leaven and seed of sin in their hearts, fermenting and growing up into the same iniquities as their forefathers. But yet God's grace is not exhausted. Still, after having in past times drawn such numbers to holiness and peace, He goes on drawing souls to holiness and peace now. We are reminded to-day of that "great multitude, which no man could number . . . clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," who praise and bless God before His throne; we are reminded to-day of all God's blessed saints, who, through all the past centuries, have been rising one by one to the courts of heaven, that we may remember and lay to heart the truth, that it is only by their own fault that men do not become saints still.

For our warning we are reminded, and for our encouragement. For our warning: for what greater

warning can there be to the slothful and the careless, than the sight and remembrance of that mighty army of God's servants, who have gone through all that we shrink from, who have done all that we declare we cannot do, and are now, after all their troubles, at rest from their labours. Is there anything which stirs us up so much, anything which so covers our face with shame, as to see another succeeding in what we have firmly and strongly said could not be done? What do we not feel when, after having taken refuge and comforted ourselves with the thought of something being impossible, we see another come after us and do it easily? We are continually, sometimes in so many words, sometimes in our secret hearts, declaring that we cannot live as the Bible calls on us to live. We set the holiness of the Gospel as something above us—so far above us that such as we cannot possibly reach it; so far above us that such as we need not think about it. When we are told of the grace of God, which will help us and give us victory, we think to ourselves that the grace of God is, as it were, worn out in our days; that it fails now to work as we read it once did. And we comfort ourselves by thinking that it is no use trying; we cannot strive against our besetting sin; we cannot learn to love God. But turn to what we are reminded of to-day. Turn, and take in the thought of all those multitudes who have done what you say you cannot do; of all those poor men who have done what you say is impossible to poor men; of all those rich men who have done what you say is impossible to rich men; of all those young men and maidens who have done what you

say is not to be expected of young people; of all those ignorant and unlearned people who have done what you say is utterly beyond the reach of those who are not scholars; of all that great communion and fellowship of God's saints, of all ages, and countries, and times, and ranks who have known God and loved Him, who have honestly overcome their sins, and had them blotted out and washed away; who have bravely faced the temptations, the dangers, the sufferings to which God called them, and in Christ's name and strength have in very deed overcome; who have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and been filled with it; who have prayed and striven to become holy, and have become holy. Turn, I say, and consider them, that great "cloud of witnesses," greater even and more perfect than that which the Apostle showed in faith to the Hebrews; and how can you say that holiness is not for you? How can you say that what they did God's grace and help will not enable you to do? How can you, in the face of that great "cloud of witnesses," how can you, for very shame, urge the plea that you cannot live in the fear and faith and obedience of your Master and theirs? How can you know them, of like nature and passions and temptations as yours, know them victorious—crowned, safe in God's hands for ever—and yet declare that it is beyond you, unnecessary, vain for you to try, impossible for you to know how even to set about it?

But not for our warning only were these things written: much more for our encouragement, much more to touch our hearts, to awaken our courage, to brace up our hope and zeal. This very thing which

puts us to shame if we are slothful, is the most animating and comforting of thoughts if we are in earnest at all. For where others have gone before us we may go. Where others have triumphed, why need we be beaten? Great as they are in our eyes now, blessed as is their condition, safe for eternity as is their lot, they were once as we are now—no better, no stronger, no happier, no more secure from evil thoughts, or the remembrance of past sin, or the fear of falling short at last. Nothing ever tries us that has not at some time or other tried them. No difficulty stands in our way—no entangling, besetting sin, which seems as if it could never be got rid of, and weighs us down and clogs our path—but once appeared to some of them to stand as an impassable barrier between them and God, between them and holiness. They were but men, yet they, by God's grace, are now saints in glory. If they look back on their days on earth, one thing in their thoughts is, doubtless, the wonder that they were so weak and spiritless, that they gave way to such weak temptations, that they let themselves be frightened by such paltry difficulties and led astray by such petty pleasures. They would tell us if they could speak, that it is not so hard, by the grace of God, even to take up the Cross and follow Christ; that Christ can make men strong, that it is only our own backwardness, our own fearfulness, that makes us afraid to trust Him. They would but confirm from their own experience what long ago St. Paul had taught, that Christ's strength was made perfect in men's weakness, and that all things that a Christian need to do, he could do through the power and help of Christ. All that

they had to bear them up and to lead them on we have; all that they knew of Christ's promises we know; and we also know even more than they, for we have seen how perfectly He has fulfilled them. We have the same grace that supported them, and we have, besides, their experience, their example, their victory. Surely, coming after them, seeing how real and true are all the things which Christ promised to those who obeyed and trusted Him, we must not shrink back and be afraid. We are one with them in Christ. We are knit together with them in one communion and fellowship. We belong to their body, we are fellow-soldiers in the same army, fellow-citizens of the same country, travellers along the same road. We run our race for the same prize, we depend on the same Saviour, we are helped by the same precious Spirit. Let us not fall short, let us not prove unworthy of their companionship. Let us keep before our eyes what we are told of their glorious reward. Let us also keep in remembrance that in following after that heavenly prize they had the same conflict with sin and temptation that we have. Their example shows that, to reach it, we must tread the same road as they did. And their example also shows us that that road is open to all, and that there is none of us, not the weakest, not the most tempted, not the most encompassed with besetting sins, but may obtain from God the power to follow them along it to the blessedness to which it leads.

There is another point of encouragement which must not be forgotten. We think of them only as persons who did some great things, who showed

their faith and love in some action or some suffering which made the world wonder and talk. Many of them did so, no doubt. Thus did Abraham, thus did Moses, thus did the Apostles, thus did many of Christ's holy servants since. But remember this. It was not their single great deeds or sufferings which made them saints. These proved to the world how great their faith and love and holiness were; but their faith and love and holiness would not have been worth much if they were only, or chiefly, shown on great occasions. If they were saints, it was because they had faith and love and holiness all day long; because they had them in their secret hearts and thoughts, where no man could know how great they were; because they had faith and love and holiness in the common course of their daily life: at their work, and in their conversation, in their homes as well as in the assemblies of men, in the Church or in the Temple. If God had so pleased, they might have gone through life without anything to try and prove their faith and love; they might have had it to Him, and it would have been as precious in His sight, only men would not have known of it. They would not have overcome when they were tried, if long before, they had not had in their hearts and quiet course of life, that holiness which was tried and found pleasing to God. There it was, there it must have been, before the hours of temptation and victory.

Let us remember, then, that holiness is to be sought and found in our quiet hours of life, when everything seems going on smoothly, and our temptations are not outwardly great ones, but only the inward, secret ones of our thoughts, our tempers, our

wishes and desires, our behaviour, kind and loving, or selfish and uncharitable, whichever it be, to our neighbours, whether few or many, rich or poor, among whom God has placed us. Here in such a life have all God's saints learned to become saints; here first they have glorified Him in private before they were called to glorify Him in public. Here, and nowhere else, have multitudes of them glorified Him. Blessed be His name for opening to us that glorious path, and bringing it so close to us, even to our common work, our humble labour, our daily struggles with our own thoughts and besetting sins. Blessed be His name for having given us such examples to guide and draw us on. And blessed above all be His name, that that grace which made them so heavenly-minded and so faithful, is still ready to help us, and to make us, too, meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. May it indeed make us to be numbered with His saints in glory everlasting!

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